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Now what?

WHAT IS THERE about Easter for a clergyperson not to love? Sanctuaries and worship spaces are decorated with beautiful flowers. The hymns are triumphant, often with brass players augmenting a strong organ and full choir. Children sport new outfits and some women even wear hats. Best of all, the pews are full. Even though we know better, for a moment or two we ministers entertain the notion that Easter Sunday is "all about me," that "all these people have come to hear what I have to say, and if I get it right this year, they'll be back next Sunday for more."

Some preachers even scold those who last showed up at Christmas—"Chreasters," as Molly Worthen called them in a *New York Times* editorial (December 23, 2012). I sometimes poked a little fun at Chreasters by reminding the crowd that we "do this" every Sunday, same time, same place. It always got a laugh. But if you come to church just once a year, why wouldn't you come on Easter, when the church lays it all on the line?

Most pastors take a break after the intensity and busyness of Lent, Holy Week services and then the Easter vigil on Saturday evening and sunrise services and a full schedule of Sunday services on Easter Day. Almost every year I took off a week or two. Yet I have always felt that the days and weeks after Easter are the most important of the church year. Those who come to church on the Sunday after Easter are the deeply faithful, the steady, loyal heart of any congregation. Theologically and homiletically, the issues in the days and weeks after Easter are "Now what?" and "So what?" Those in the pews during Easter-tide have these questions on their minds.

I've always loved the authentically human way Jesus'

friends conduct themselves after the crucifixion and resurrection appearances. According to the fourth Gospel, they essentially did nothing. They hid in a locked room in Jerusalem, waiting for things to settle down so they could sneak out of town and return to the lives they'd had "before Jesus." Then Christ appeared to them, and his first words were: "Peace be with you," followed by "As the Father sent me, so I send you." Send. That's the answer to "Now what?" People who experience resurrection are "sent." And that's the answer to "So what?" People who have experienced the victory of life and love over evil and death are to leave the room—the safe, secure place—and go back out into the world.

That is why the days and weeks after Easter are so important. Friends of Jesus, fresh from triumphant celebration, were sent back out into same world that rejected, tortured and killed him—which is to say into the world in which we live.

I understand the impulse to stay in that room. The world looks ominous and disconcerting and frightening. North Korea has nuclear weapons and seems ready to use them. Iran continues, undeterred, to develop nuclear capacity. Israel does not seem much interested in a resolution with the Palestinians. Suicide bombers in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan do their ghastly work as American troops prepare to come home. At home fiscal issues seem unresolvable.

The "Now what?" and "So what?" of Easter are that people who have experienced resurrection are sent into the world to live intentionally, faithfully, courageously—and with those haunting first resurrection words burning in their hearts. "Peace be with you.... As the Father sent me, so I send you."

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Online education

We appreciated Lawrence Wood's exploration of online forms of education taking shape in seminaries and divinity schools ("Face to screen learning," Feb. 20). Wood and the CENTURY are right to feature these important developments for the formation of those called to serve the church and the world.

Yet we must offer a slight correction. Contrary to Wood, Duke Divinity School has, in fact, begun two new degree programs that offer forms of online education: the Doctor of Ministry and the Master of Arts in Christian Practice, the latter focusing on the formation of lay ministers serving congregations. These two programs hold together a commitment to embodied community and the use of new online technologies. While we at Duke Divinity School remain committed to a residential M.Div. program, the D.Min. and M.A.C.P. programs offer courses in a hybrid model, combining residential intensives with interactive, online components. We share a sense that these technologies can extend the school's reach, encouraging the accessibility of theological formation.

Jeff Conklin-Miller

Craig Hill

*Duke Divinity School,
Durham, N.C.*

I was excited to see the "Virtual seminary" cover but extremely disappointed that the article on the subject did not acknowledge that the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary has a distance education program.

In the spring of 2012 UDTs graduated its first Distance M. Div. students. I am a member of the class of 2015. Distance education allows me to keep my full-time job so I can afford to pay for seminary without grants and loans. Two times a year (August and January) I travel to UDTs for a two-week residential intensive. The faculty and staff have been intentional about integrating the dis-

tance students with the residential students, faculty and staff.

We have a sophisticated online interface. Our Moodle site is set up with pages for our classes and a community life page. Professors design discussion forums for the online students in place of the in-class discussions. I believe we have deeper and more inclusive discussions online because we are all required to participate and required to respond to the comments of others. Our professors are as close as our computers if we have questions. In fact, I think it may be easier to connect with the professors via Moodle because they are monitoring discussions and checking their e-mail daily.

What works and what doesn't? As a student, I would say it all works well and what doesn't is addressed and changed. I am incredibly impressed with the seminary's commitment to distance education, and I believe that the virtual seminary is vital in preparing students for ministry.

Catherine B. Bishop

Sioux City, Ia.

Reformation revisited . . .

Ronald Rittgers's review of Brad S. Gregory's *The Unintended Reformation* ("Blame it on Luther," Jan. 23) generated three concerns in my mind. First, Gregory reportedly maintains that Protestant belief in salvation by grace alone precludes the view that growth in *caritas* is essential to salvation. Rittgers indicates that Gregory believes "growth in virtue . . . is the goal and prerequisite of salvation." Is this a claim that salvation is awarded to those who have earned it by their virtue? Would Paul agree? Perhaps it works the other way: the result of salvation is virtue accompanied by *caritas* (James 1:27).

Second, Gregory reportedly lists as one of the "decisive failures" in Western history the unsuccessful subjugation of the church to the state. But what about

the statement by the Barmen Confession that not only must the church not be controlled by the state, but the word and work are not to be subjugated even to a church's plans and purposes?

Finally, as Rittgers noted, Gregory's perhaps idealized medieval Christendom was and is in schism with the Eastern Christian tradition. If the Eastern tradition is indeed Eastern orthodoxy, then the Western tradition is Roman heresy.

John W. Bates

Hickory, N.C.

Church bashing . . .

Reading Anna Madsen's review of *The Underground Church*, by Robin Meyers (Feb. 20), with its trumpet call for a subversive underground movement, has prompted a bit of reflection. Since church bashing in its myriad forms has a 2,000-year history, modern attempts at it (often by professional theologians) can seem a bit tired and stale, as with Meyers's wholesale judgment of believing communities living in "the suffocating security of a safely played faith."

Fortunately, the reviewer with "experience as a rural pastor in a rural state" expressed the needed qualms about bringing grand and noble visions of radical subversion down to little people in little places where they have not yet heard that the "myth" of Christian belief is irrelevant (or worse) to active discipleship.

These supposedly avant-garde prescriptions for the ever-present ills of the church, well written and carefully edited, apparently sell well and no doubt look good on an academic résumé. But how much help are they to persistent clergy and laity laboring daily in the trenches with ordinary people who get sick, suffer, grieve, die and need caring friendship?

Donald Walden

Urbana, Ill.

April 3, 2013

Cutting the military

The sequestration cuts that began to be implemented this month—\$1.1 trillion in federal budget cuts, divided equally between defense and nondefense areas—are like an inkblot test. One group of observers sees the cuts in military spending and worries about a weakened defense; another group sees the reduction in domestic spending and laments the pain that will be felt by the poor and unemployed and the harm done to research and education.

Some progressives, like former Vermont governor Howard Dean, note that defense spending has long been a sacred cow in American politics and think it's worth suffering the cuts in domestic programs to get across-the-board cuts to the military, which accounts for one-fifth of the nation's budget. The 7.9 percent sequester reduction will cause a little pain at the Pentagon. Procurement of weapons systems will be slowed down. Civilian employees of the military will bear the brunt of the cuts—they will have to take off one day per week, without pay, for the last 22 weeks of the year.

But the defense cuts don't go very deep. The United States will still spend as much on defense as the next 13 countries in the world combined. The new, reduced level of military spending will equal what it was in 2006, at the peak of the Iraq War.

The nation still needs a probing debate about the proper role of the military in foreign affairs, national security and financial priorities and the appropriate size of the defense budget. Two decades ago, the end of the cold war momentarily promised a peace dividend. Two invasions of Iraq, a war in Afghanistan and the so-called war on terror eroded that possibility.

But not every problem in the world demands a military solution. In fact, most require sustained efforts of diplomacy and foreign aid and development. Compared to the size of the defense budget, the State Department is grossly underfunded, as is the U.S. Institute of Peace, which pursues nonviolent means of resolving conflicts.

For reasons of domestic health as well, the U.S. needs to shift spending away from defense toward programs in education, scientific research, green technology, job training and infrastructure. These are the true sources of national strength. Peter Feaver, a political scientist at Duke University, argues that military spending has the capacity “to destroy a state by draining it of resources.”

Some advocates of limited government believe that the federal government has but one task—national security. But as Andrew J. Bacevich points out (in *The New American Militarism*), defense is only one of a number of tasks charged to the federal government. It is time to rebalance national spending so that the nation's resources are properly devoted to those other crucial tasks—forming a more perfect union, establishing justice, promoting the general welfare and securing the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

The nation needs a probing debate about the proper role of the military.

CENTURY marks

ABOUT FACE: S. Brian Willson's parents were conservative Baptists in upstate New York. His father belonged to the John Birch Society and gave money to the Ku Klux Klan. Willson became an airforce officer and served in Vietnam, where he came upon a South Vietnamese village that had just been napalmed by American forces. Most of the victims—dead or lying in pain on the ground—were women and children. He began to sob and gag at the scene. This experience turned him into a war resister. He lost his legs while lying across a railroad track in the U.S., trying to block a train carrying munitions. Willson, who is also dedicated to ecological concerns, has ridden 60,000 miles on a handcycle since 1997 (*Sun*, March).

LIVING WAGE: Debates about the minimum wage usually overlook the religious roots of the concept. John A. Ryan, an Irish Catholic priest from Minnesota, coined the term "living wage" and based it on Catholic social teaching. In 1894 he wrote in his diary: "We must have a more just distribution of wealth." In 1906 he published a book called *A Living Wage*. In 1937 he became the first Catholic to give an invocation at a presidential inauguration (Franklin D. Roosevelt's second). A year later FDR signed the first national law requiring a minimum wage law—25 cents an hour (*Tikkun*, February 26).

OCCUPY SUCCESS: Critics of the Occupy Wall Street movement say it

failed largely because of a lack of organization and focus. Jeff Madrick argues that the movement was a success not so much in changing policies as in raising public awareness of inequities. "We are the 99 percent" will remain a political slogan every bit as galvanizing for its time as "Hell no, we won't go" was for the antiwar protesters of the 1960s and 1970s, he says. Civil rights demonstrations and antiwar movements were criticized in their day for being unfocused, but they led to enduring change (*Harper's*, March).

PAPAL POWERS: Liberal Catholic theologian Hans Küng points out the Roman Catholic Church got along without the papacy as we know it today for a millennium. It was Pope Gregory VII in the 11th century who gave Catholics three enduring elements of the Roman system: "a centralist-absolutist papacy, compulsory clericalism and the obligation of celibacy for priests and other secular clergy." Küng argues that the church needs a pope who knows how deep the church's crisis is and how to lead the church out of it. He calls for the church to hold another council along the lines of Vatican II, this time gathering a "representative assembly of bishops, priests and lay people" (*New York Times*, February 27).

OUTSOURCED WEDDINGS: A focus on elaborate wedding ceremonies has led to the quest for the perfect wedding and rising employment for wedding planners. Wedding planners often play the role of pastor and therapist. Expensive weddings cause some wedding guests to joke that they hope the marriage lasts long enough to pay off the wedding (Arlie Russell Hochschild, author of *The Outsourced Self*, interviewed by Mars Hill Audio Journal, vol. 115).



"As you can see, we're the good guys."

STRESSED: Rising levels of stress are causing more depression among pastors. Stressors include declines in membership and contributions, personal financial worries (often due to educational debt), and discord in congregations. One of the top predictors of depression is social isolation. Pastors moving from hospital visits to funerals to weddings experience a range of unpredictable emotions—another indicator of depression. On the positive side, some pastoral counselors see an increase in the number of pastors who are willing to seek professional help and are open with their congregations about their emotional difficulties (ABP).

ANXIOUS EXISTENCE: At about 10 percent of the population, Christians make up one of the largest religious minorities in Syria. The people of the village of Yacoubiyeh in northern Syria are getting a glimpse of what life in their country might be like if the rebels take over. It is one of the few minority-dominated villages controlled by the rebels, who have mostly taken over Sunni-dominated areas. The rebels are trying to assure the Christians that they'll continue to have relative freedoms. They may drink alcohol in their homes but not in public. Christians in Syria are concerned, though, about the increasingly extremist Islamic rhetoric coming from some of the rebels (AP).

PLAGUED: The massive infestation of locusts in Egypt right before the Jewish Passover struck many Israelis as down-right biblical. Millions of grasshopper-like insects swarmed over Israel's neighbor, and some made their way to southern Israel. Israeli agricultural experts are on high alert, fearing that the locusts could devastate crops. Some Israelis have noted that varieties of the leggy pests are kosher. Locusts were the eighth plague visited upon the Egyptians, according to the Exodus story (RNS).

YEAST OF THE CHRISTIANS: Some churches are using the popularity of craft beer and home brewing to reach out to young adults. Valley Church (Methodist) in Allendale, Michigan, holds semiregular meetings of beer enthusiasts and home brewers. The events go by the moniker

“Sixty thousand people have died in Syria’s civil war, Egypt is on the brink of state collapse, and the region is moving toward Sunni-Shiite confrontation. These are not problems that can be addressed by drone strikes and fitful diplomacy.”

— Journalist George Packer, criticizing the Obama administration for promising more engagement in foreign affairs than it has delivered and for relying too much on the CIA and the military in shaping foreign policy (*New Yorker*, February 11 & 18)

“The church has rightly been attacked for hypocrisy. But is nobody else guilty? If the church is hypocritical about sex, the media are hypocritical about hypocrisy.”

— New Testament scholar N. T. Wright, observing that the media widely cover sex scandals in the church, but they have their own scandals to deal with (*Guardian*, March 6)

“What would Jesus brew?” St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Wilmington, North Carolina, sponsored a home brewing contest with other churches in the city as a fund-raiser. At least two church brewing groups have turned into commercial operations—Hess Brewing Company in San Diego and Monday Night Brewing in Atlanta. They claim they are part of an old church tradition: some monasteries have long brewed beer to serve their guests (*Wall Street Journal*, March 8).

PROTEST IN THE ACADEMY:
Marshall Sahlins, a highly regarded

anthropologist at the University of Chicago, has resigned from the National Academy of Sciences in protest. He objected to military-related research projects done by the academy and the election of anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon to the NSA. If it is involved at all in military-related projects, Sahlins said, NAS “should be studying how to promote peace, not how to make war.” Sahlins accuses Chagnon of having “done serious harm to the indigenous communities among whom he did research.” Chagnon has just published a new book, *Noble Savages* (InsideHigherEd, February 25).

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION & THE GOVERNMENT

Over the past few decades the government has paid too much attention to the problems of blacks and other minorities:



Discrimination against whites has become as big a problem today as discrimination against blacks and other minorities:



Due to rounding, totals may not equal 100%.

SOURCE: PUBLIC RELIGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Faith groups seize political moment

Gun control in sight

by Daniel Schultz

DAYS AFTER the December mass shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence convened a press conference. The national coalition petitioned Congress to demand background checks for all gun purchases, ban high-capacity weapons and magazines and make gun trafficking a federal crime. Representatives of 47 religious organizations signed on—not just liberals but also evangelical leaders such as Samuel Rodriguez and T. D. Jakes.

The group was ready to respond to the tragedy because ending gun violence has long been a cause among faith-based activists. Some mainline denominations have been working on the issue since the 1980s. The National Council of Churches worked to pass the assault weapons ban of 1994, which has since expired. According to Washington office director Cassandra Carmichael, since Newtown the NCC—at the request of the Connecticut Council of Churches—has provided pertinent worship and pastoral resources. Carmichael notes that the group is also doing coordinating work to “make sure the moral message doesn’t get lost.”

In fall 2010, activist Vincent DeMarco, working under the auspices of the Brady Campaign, began to pull together a broad faith-based coalition. The project, modeled on DeMarco’s successful antitobacco work, eventually became Faiths United. Years of partnerships through the NCC and elsewhere paid off: DeMarco’s coalition started with 17 charter members and quickly expanded.

This year, Faiths United has worked with Auburn Seminary’s Auburn Action

program to translate its statement into action: a recent *Faiths Calling* event generated more than 10,000 phone contacts with congressional offices. Auburn Action also supports several state-level petition drives and one in the Los Angeles region, along with a multifaith Gun Violence Sabbath sponsored by the PICO National Network.

Not all faith-based efforts are what Bryan Miller calls “grassroots” work, meaning national mobilization and activism. Miller directs Heeding God’s Call, a Philadelphia-based organization with several chapters in Pennsylvania

sylvania, but Miller plans to expand to other cities as well.

Chicago has seen a startling uptick in gun violence in recent years. In 2012, 2,400 people were shot there; 435 of them were killed. Early last year, All Saints Episcopal Church responded by organizing an event just before Holy Week: CROSSwalk, a liturgical procession across downtown Chicago to remember the victims and press for change.

The turnout—1,500 participants—was impressive enough to convince the Epis-

Faith-based groups have been working for years to prevent gun violence.

and Maryland. The group works with local churches and religious leaders to pressure gun-store owners into signing a code of conduct designed to prevent straw purchases, in which a buyer passes a weapon along to a third party, circumventing regulations.

Heeding God’s Call puts its partnerships together one phone call at a time. In the Philadelphia area, it’s garnered the support of 70 churches, synagogues and mosques. In addition to its gun-store campaigns, the group holds prayer vigils—Miller calls them “murder-site witnesses”—at the locations of gun homicides. According to Miller, the goal is “to let people in damaged communities know they’re not totally isolated, that there are people who are concerned about the violence they’re facing.” For now these events are held only in Philadelphia and Harrisburg, Penn-

sylvania; but Miller plans to expand to other cities as well.

copal Diocese of Chicago to make it an ongoing project. CROSSwalk Chicago director Jacqueline Clark expects 2,500 people to come out on the Friday before Holy Week for the second annual event. Others will get involved by advocating for tighter straw-purchasing regulations or volunteering to build and maintain memorials to slain children.

Like Heeding God’s Call, CROSSwalk Chicago works hard to build a local coalition to address a chronic problem. Clark speaks of the “very slow work” of “building relationships across lines.” Still, she works with a sense of urgency. “Aurora is like a weekend in Chicago,” she says, referring to the 2012 Colorado shooting that killed 12 and injured dozens. “Not that Aurora isn’t particularly horrifying,” she clarifies. But the comparison serves as “a reminder that this violence is taking place in our city and in

many cities" day to day—not just in mass shootings.

Yet mass shootings do spark new efforts for change. In the wake of Newtown, Christian writers Ellen Painter Dollar and Katherine Willis Pershey began conversing about gun violence. Inspired by Gary Wills's provocative claim that American gun worship is tantamount to idolatry, Dollar and Pershey formed an online campaign, #It Is Enough, using social media to encourage action on the 14th of each month—the day of the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary.

Like other activists, Dollar and Pershey have relatively straightforward goals: universal and effective background checks, a ban on high-capacity weapons, improved tracing of weapons used in crimes and education on gun violence. Pershey, a Disciples of Christ minister serving a United Church of Christ congregation in suburban Chicago, has also begun a Shalom Seekers group within her church.

But while activists' immediate goals may be narrowly drawn, the endgame is anything but. "I believe we need stronger gun laws," says Pershey. "I also see that as one piece of a larger picture, which is the transformation of a violent culture."

The NCC's Carmichael wants to "totally eliminate" the problem one day, to "create communities that don't produce this kind of gun violence."

Of course, recent U.S. history is littered with the husks of failed faith-based campaigns to change society. What makes these activists think this time will be different?

DeMarco has the answer out before the question's finished: "Newtown changed everything." He makes an analogy to the galvanizing effect that police brutality in Birmingham had on the civil rights movement. What strategy will Faiths United employ to overcome the powerful NRA lobbying machine? "The same strategy that worked on tobacco. Nobody thought tobacco companies could lose in Congress, but they did, because the faith community has moral authority and the ability to mobilize people from one end of the country to the

other, across party lines and ideological lines."

Carmichael feels that the Newtown tragedy prompted a new level of awareness and concern. "There was something about those shootings that motivated people to action," she says. "It just seems like it's time for it to end."

Pershey echoes this sentiment, pointing out that her slogan "It is enough" refers not just to Jesus' comment to sword-wielding disciples but also to feeling fed up with gun violence. Miller of Heeding God's Call points to the basic religious imperative to "save the lives of God's children," an idea he says is spreading through the faith community. "There is so much death and injury," he says. "People are aware of it and want to change it."

Gun-control advocates are cautiously optimistic. "We've seen a lot of movement in Congress already," says DeMarco. "People are talking about universal background checks in a way they just hadn't before."

Jim Winkler of the United Methodist Church recalls a recent meeting with representatives of the Obama administration. They "essentially committed that

President Obama and Vice President Biden are going to be personally and actively involved on gun control," he says. "There's no doubt—that's just gigantic."

But the prize is not yet in reach, and the activists know it. "It's going to be a fight," says CROSSwalk Chicago's Clark. And like any coalition project, faith-based efforts on gun control find members working at different speeds, with some far ahead of others on certain issues.

Yet Miller feels that "the faith community has to be out front" on gun control "in order for this country to reach the low levels of gun violence that every other developed country has." And while "there's been a major change since Newtown," Miller is cautious: a long-term effort is needed, yet some might be satisfied to "just take whatever's done in Washington in the next two months and say, 'OK, that's it.'"

The problem, says Miller, is that "even if [Congress] enacted the three major things they're working on—an assault-weapons ban, a limit on high-capacity ammunition magazines and universal background checks—there's still going to be thousands of Americans dying from guns every year."

cc

Burying my mother

This is what our wandering life has come to.
Our dead stay where they're put, in different states.
We buried her beside the Texan, who
also loved her. Then we closed the gates.

None of us will join her. There's the spot
they dug for hours to slide my brother in.
He lies beside my father in her plot—
or what was hers once—beneath Nebraska sun.

In Philadelphia, now, I will not rave
or overstate my grief. I won't fly with flowers
to grace their level markers. I'm not brave.
Our family's scattered. Will be. Nothing's surer.

Who is she, elbow cocked against the sun,
waving to me this morning on the lawn?

Daniel Schultz is a writer and adjunct instructor in Wisconsin.

Jeanne Murray Walker

Christian Century April 3, 2013

Finding peace at a monastery

Refuge and strength

by Suzanne Guthrie

I SEE THE monastery sign and drive past. I'm too ashamed to turn in. So I continue on to the next town where I buy my five-year-old son a hot chocolate and myself a coffee at a convenience store. We sit in a booth by the steamy window watching cars pull in and out and leave deep ruts in the icy slush at the gasoline pump.

I know two monks from California who now live at Holy Cross Monastery in upstate New York. Maybe they can help me. I'm grabbing at every possible lead. I'm chronically ill, exhausted, in shock and about to be divorced. We're staying temporarily with friends where my nine-year-old daughter numbs herself by watching television. My two older boys are in Germany with their father. For the first time since the age of 22 I have no prayer life. I'm empty, and things will soon become even worse for me. Finally, I find the courage to turn around and drive back toward the monastery.

A few weeks later a sympathetic employee at Holy Cross helps me find a place to live in Poughkeepsie. The children and I try to go to parish churches, but seeing families together distresses my daughter and me. "Why can't we just go to church at the monastery?" she asks. Why not? My son makes caves for his stuffed animals in the monks' choir stalls. My daughter primly times the sermons. They love being the only children there. We come home to donuts and the Sunday comics, our clothes scented with incense.

A secretarial job opens up at the monastery. Every day I look up from my desk to the sign over the guesthouse door: *Crux Est Mundi Medicina*—the cross is the medicine of the world. And I begin to heal. We meet wonderful people, including a gentle, sweet, quiet man

I'll eventually marry. After two years working at the monastery, I go back into parish ministry. But from then on, except for one brief period, I work and live near the monastery.

That was 25 years ago. Today my social worker son—a case manager at a homeless shelter—says that the monastery has been the one stable place in his life. Back when my daughter was involved in drugs and other mischief, the prior of the monastery told her she could come and find refuge there day or night. Whether she ever took him up on it I don't know, but he shrewdly offered her a stability that impressed her at a crucial moment. I found stability too, in a life of prayer that re-formed itself amid the solid, grounded architecture, the thick walls, the rounded Romanesque windows and arches designed by Henry Vaughan and Ralph Adams Cram. The monastery continues to give me a space to pray without any responsibility other than being open to God.

I know that I can pray anywhere, and I've always prayed in the churches I've served. The parish church is a good place to pray for parishioners, their families, their concerns and questions amidst the multiple tragedies that hit like a car pile-up on a foggy interstate. When I am alone in a church, people's shadows sit in their pews, while the exhausting intuitive pain I feel for them lingers at the communion rail. Healings, resolutions, transitions, absences and rites of passage clutter my parish prayer, as they should.

And responsibilities! I notice that the lightbulb needs changing and that dust is gathering behind the altar where the sexton irrationally refuses to sweep. I worry about where the money is going to come

from to fix the roof. I wince at aesthetic dissonance. I bring distraction and anxiety to the convent chapel where I serve. I can't go into our worship space without worrying about the potted flowers, the weeds erupting between the patio bricks, the mistakes in landscaping I've made and how my own preaching and responsibilities for the space affect visitors as well as the sisters and residents here.

But when I go to the monastery none of those concerns confront me. Some monk or staff person takes care of all that. I can enjoy, with detachment, the monastery aesthetics, liturgy and atmosphere. Designed for hospitality, the guesthouse purposefully offers a place of prayer in relative comfort, including magnificent meals for which the guesthouse is well known. I come to visit my friends, to worship and to honor Christian holy days whenever I can. Right now I'm settled in a comfortable chair with my computer, writing an essay about prayer for the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*.

I've been seriously at prayer for 40 years now. I pretty much perceive that I "pray at all times and in all places." But I acknowledge that different spaces offer different qualities of experience. I pray in our convent chapel with the sisters and on my own; I pray in the dining room, in the gardens and on the paths between our buildings. I pray with the cows and in my kitchen. I pray at my desk. I pray in my body, with my intellect and imagination and in my heart. I lurch into prayer when I read the *New York*

Suzanne Guthrie prepares a self-guided retreat on each Sunday's Gospel reading at the website *At the Edge of the Enclosure*. She lives with the Community of the Holy Spirit in Brewster, New York.

Times. The atmosphere surrounding my pillow at night is as much a chapel as any consecrated place on earth.

But I still come back to Holy Cross

Monastery, especially to pray. The thick brick and the rounded arches still shape my prayer and ground me. I renew a sense of stability, and I'm grateful to be a

guest in a place designed, built and maintained for loving receptivity with God, a place with no other agenda for my attention but prayer.

CC

Mine for the giving

Designer mittens

by Debra Bendis

She was sitting on the cement sidewalk along Michigan Avenue on a February day. She must have been numb with cold. I could imagine that cold settling in as she sat, and I shuddered. "Here," I said, bending down to greet her with a gift card. "This is worth \$3 at Dunkin' Donuts. Get something hot." She didn't say thank you. Instead, she looked up at my cherished fur-lined leather mittens and said, "Those mittens look warm."

I said, "Yes, they are" and resisted a sudden urge to thrust them deep into my pockets. The encounter troubled me all morning. I'd left her with a voucher for a bowl of soup that would last a few minutes, but her thin knit gloves would let the cold in all day and all night. By lunchtime, I'd made up my mind to do something. I'd walk by the same corner, and if the woman was still there, I'd go get her a pair of mittens.

When I saw her still begging at the corner, I walked to a drugstore. But nothing on the shelves was any warmer than what she was wearing. OK, I thought, determined not to give up once I'd begun, I'll try another store. But that store had nothing useful either—the cold snap had cleared out the glove and mitten section. One more store, I thought, and I'll have to give up. Again, there wasn't much to choose from. Then at the bottom of the display, I discovered a pair of snazzy, double-thick knit mittens with bold white and black diagonal stripes

and a knitted cuff that went halfway to the elbow.

I jumped when I read the price. No wonder the mittens were still there; they were expensive, even at this discount store. Then I saw the reason: the tag said Kate Spade. It was the first time I'd seen this designer's work outside of a glossy magazine. My street acquaintance, I reasoned, didn't need the Kate Spade label in order to appreciate the mittens, and I didn't need to pay the Kate Spade price. But as I foraged among the remaining pairs of mittens it became clear that either I would invest in Kate Spade mittens or give up on my idea of helping the woman on the sidewalk. I bought the mittens.

When returned to the woman, I said, "I've found some mittens. Will these help?" She looked not at me but at the mittens. Her eyes were bright as she reached for them. I think she said thank you.

In the larger picture, not much had changed. I glowed from the woman's grateful response to my good deed, but in the meantime I was ignoring two other homeless women standing nearby. On the way back to work, I passed up a few more asking for help. That night my husband kidded me about the eventual destination of those mittens. Maybe, he teased, you'll see the Kate Spade mittens lined up next to other designer items at a flea market. Or maybe she'll greet you

tomorrow with, "That scarf looks warm" or "That looks like a warm coat." What did I plan for an encore?

What had I accomplished with my gesture? Wouldn't my money be better spent on an organization that feeds or houses or trains some of the city's homeless? Wasn't I encouraging begging? Wouldn't it have been better to direct the woman to one of the organizations that would serve her needs with practical wisdom and insight?

I wonder how Christ managed to greet so many and share his wisdom and healing powers with so many people. I'm convinced that this son of God/son of man must have had a deep and ready sense of humor. When he healed ten lepers and nine of them ran off without thanking him, what could he do? He must have smiled and shaken his head. My one gesture hardly equates to Christ's interactions with multitudes. But I don't want the realization of my limitations to restrain me from acting when I can. Giving the mittens away exercised my charitable muscles—and maybe brought some joy and blessing to a place that sees little of it. And I saw in my street neighbor's bright eyes a glimpse of the holy joy that Christ must have stirred up.

The next day I walked by the woman again. I didn't stop, didn't even break stride. But I did look at her hands—there were no mittens. I hope they were in her pocket, but it doesn't really matter. They were mine for the giving.

CC

Churches weather the recession

by John Dart
 News Editor

A survey that asked churches how they fared during the economic recession found that there was a collective sigh of relief from most pastors and congregational leaders—nearly 75 percent said “well” or “very well.” And the majority of congregations (65 percent) reported that their finances either remained the same or improved in giving from 2010 to 2011, after the worst of the recession.

Nonetheless, troubling signs appeared in the data in the 2013 Congregational Economic Impact Study, according to William G. Enright, director of the Lake Institute on Faith & Giving at the Indiana University School of Philanthropy. In an interview with the CENTURY, he cited a few of them:

- “Only four in ten congregations reported that their revenues (donations and other income) kept pace with the 8 percent rate of inflation between 2007 and 2011, which means 60 percent did not.”

- “It appears that there might be an overly optimistic tendency among congregations to see things in a more positive light than reality allows when you consider the lessened value of the dollar,” he said. One-third of the churches said their finances “worsened” during the economic slump.

- “Recovery from the recession does not appear to be as robust as that of other sectors of charitable giving,” he said, citing another study (Giving USA) that said religion was the only charitable sector that got fewer dollars in 2011 than in 2010.

- Congregations with a younger aver-

age age (between 35 and 54 years) were more likely than older-membership churches (55 and above) to increase their giving from 2010 to 2011—a statistic of interest to aging congregations seeking to bring in new energy from younger generations.

The study provides a comparatively large window on mainline Protestants.

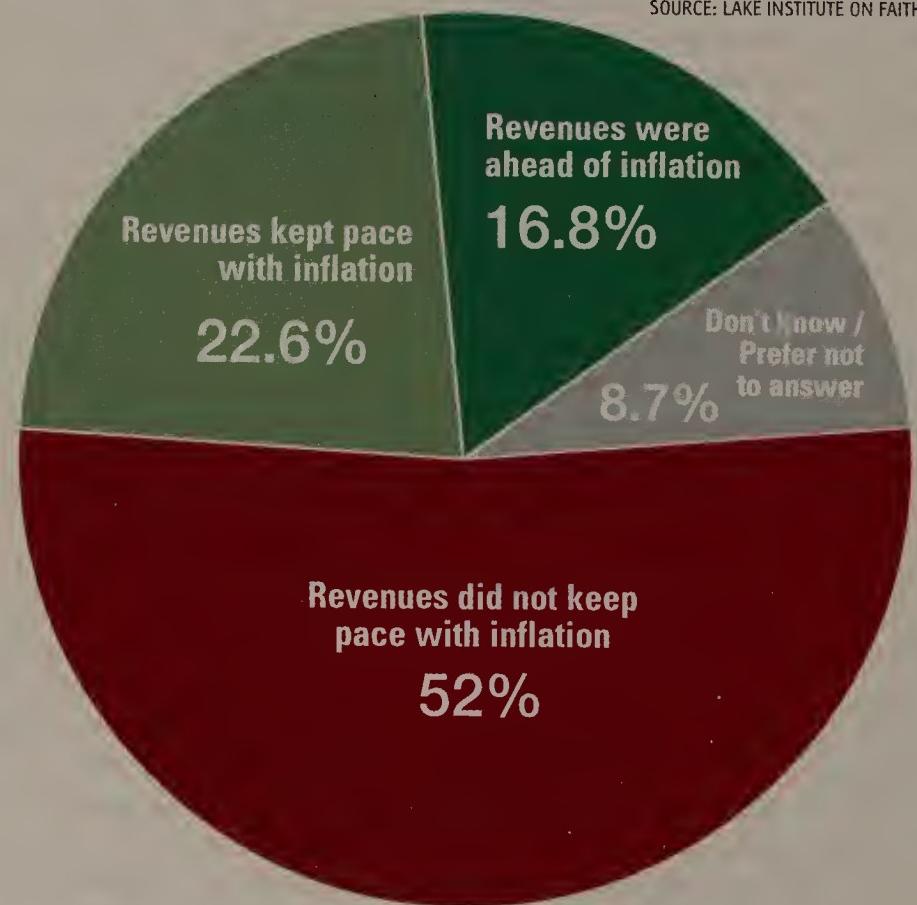
Two-thirds of the 3,100 U.S. congregations surveyed were from the ranks of mainline churches and a quarter from evangelical congregations. Evangelicals (26 percent) currently outnumber mainline Protestants (18 percent), according to the Pew Forum.

A major partner with the Lake Institute surveys is the Alban Institute,

MOST CHURCH INCOMES TRAILLED PACE OF INFLATION 2007–2011

Inflation increased 8 percent between 2007 and 2011, the first years of the recession. Slightly more than half (52 percent) of the survey's 3,100 respondents reported that their congregation's year-end revenues did not keep pace with inflation. Together, 39 percent of respondents reported that revenues kept pace with or were ahead of inflation.

SOURCE: LAKE INSTITUTE ON FAITH & GIVING



Due to rounding, totals may not equal 100%.

which has a large mainline church constituency. Some respondents were from Catholic parishes, historic black churches and other denominations.

While 75 to 80 percent of Catholic priests and black church clergy are aware of who gives and how much, only 46 percent of mainline clergy and lay leaders said their pastors are aware of the giving trends in their congregations. Enright said the “laissez-faire approach” is misguided.

“While many clergy are reluctant to delve into information related to individual giving, it is via their giving that many donors turn their beliefs into a way of living,” Enright said in a statement when the Lake Institute study was released on March 5. Church members and attendees “do not see this form of pastoral care as offensive or intrusive.”

Cash and checks are still common methods of donating to church coffers. But two of every three congregations

use some form of electronic giving. Beyond direct deposit and credit and debit cards, some houses of worship even provide indoor kiosks for attendees to make payments.

“Congregations are remarkably resilient,” said Una Osili, research director for the School of Philanthropy. “There are still many in need, but it appears that the majority we surveyed are recovering from the worst of the Great Recession.”

Enright added: “They really tried to be good stewards of limited resources. The last things that many of them wanted to cut were outreach programs and missions to their communities. They put a cap on salary increases and deferred building maintenance first.”

One respondent to the survey wrote to the institute: “Every week, what we get in our Sunday offerings we now give to a different nonprofit in our community.”

Bishop Minerva Carcaño on immigration front line

When United Methodist Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño talks about tussling with political bigwigs on the topic of immigration reform, she is poised yet forceful.

As the first female Hispanic bishop elected in the nation’s second-largest Protestant denomination, Carcaño has had a lot of practice keeping her cool, especially when it comes to discussing divisive politics.

“Immigrants can stay as long as they don’t ask for more than we want to give them, and as long they keep serving our needs at whatever pittance of pay we want to extend to them,” Carcaño said in an interview in her office in Pasadena, California. “When people begin to say that’s not fair, that’s not just, then that ruffles feathers.”

Carcaño has emerged as a key religious player on the hot-button political debate over immigration reform.

On March 7, Carcaño was among 14 religious leaders who met with President Obama at the White House. (The group included Kathryn Lohre, president of the National Council of Churches; José Gomez, Catholic archbishop of Los Angeles; Samuel Rodriguez, president, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference; Leith Anderson, president, National Association of Evangelicals; Fred Luter, president, Southern Baptist Convention; and Mohammed Magid, president, Islamic Society of North America.)

Carcaño praised the president for his “courageous leadership” with his executive order last year that granted children of undocumented immigrants the opportunity to remain in the U.S., attend school, work and serve in the military. “Immigration is for young people, for children, for families,” she added, as quoted by the National Council of Churches.

While that meeting left the bishop with a sense that “immigration reform is indeed a very high priority for the president,” she doesn’t shy away from voicing her own critiques. For example, she says, there is still too much emphasis on securing the border.

Megachurches are thriving in hard times, survey says

DESPITE THE tough economy, many of the nation’s largest churches are thriving, with increased offerings and plans to hire more staff, a new survey shows.

Just 3 percent of churches with 2,000 or more attendance surveyed by Leadership Network, a Dallas-based church think tank, said they were affected “very negatively” by the economy in recent years. Close to half—47 percent—said they were affected “somewhat negatively,” but one-third said they were not affected at all.

The vast majority—83 percent—of the 729 large churches surveyed expected to meet their budgets in 2012 or their current fiscal year. A majority of large churches also reported that offerings during worship services were higher last year than in 2011.

Even though some churches have ministries that provide other income,

such as schools or wedding chapel rentals, an average of 96 percent of their budget comes from members’ donations.

All of the large churches reported that they receive some of their donations electronically, including online, via bank transfer or through a lobby kiosk. One in five of them receive between 31 and 60 percent of their offerings electronically.

Most megachurches surveyed spend 10 percent or more of their budget beyond their congregation on causes ranging from local soup kitchens to world missions.

Another sign of economic well-being: most large churches report that they expect to give staff at least a 1 percent raise in the next budget cycle. Most also expect to modestly increase staff, and hardly any—just 6 percent—expect to reduce the number of staffers. —Adelle M. Banks, RNS



CRUSADING ON IMMIGRATION:
When United Methodist Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño talks about tussling with political bigwigs on the topic of immigration reform, she is poised yet forceful.

Carcaño believes that immigration reform needs to include a way to reunite families that have been separated because of U.S. policies, and while Obama speaks of cracking down on employers who hire undocumented workers, she believes that the labor rights of immigrants need to be respected.

In addition to her role as immigration spokesperson for the United Methodists' Council of Bishops, Carcaño leads the church's California-Pacific Conference, an area that covers much of Southern California, Hawaii and U.S. territories in the Pacific Ocean, such as Guam.

Carcaño, 59, grew up in Edinburg, Texas, not far from the U.S.-Mexico border. Her maternal grandmother was the first Protestant in the family.

The oldest of seven children, Carcaño felt an early call to ministry. But when at age 14 she confessed to her parents that she was contemplating a life of service in the church, her mother cried. Her father's reaction wasn't much better, commanding her, in a fit of anger, to go back to doing the dishes, Carcaño recalls.

Her father, however, also deeply influenced Carcaño's views on immigration. Although he initially came to the United States from Mexico in the 1940s under the Bracero Program which allowed the importation of temporary workers, after the program ended he crossed the border illegally because of financial hardship.

He was, Carcaño explained, detained, threatened and accused of dealing drugs. "He would say to us, 'I've never even taken an aspirin. I didn't know what a pill looked like or a drug looked liked,'" Carcaño said. "The experience on the border really left him scarred for life."

After graduating from the University of Texas-Pan American in 1975, Carcaño earned a master's degree in theology from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas in 1979.

She has served churches across much of the American West, including Oregon and New Mexico, but she says her most challenging role came after she was elected bishop in 2004. That's when she presided over the church's Phoenix-based Desert Southwest Conference, an area that includes parts of Arizona, Nevada and California.

Phoenix proved to be a difficult place for Carcaño. Traveling with other religious leaders, Carcaño says she angered Arizona Sen. John McCain when she confronted him about the state's get-tough 2010 immigration bill, which allows police officers to check the immigration status of anyone they stop. "A senator can be biting your head off," she said, "but you have to stand by your principles."

Harriett Jane Olson, chief executive officer of the 800,000-member United Methodist Women, praises Carcaño for "really boundary-breaking leadership that she has exercised in a region of the country where it hasn't always gone smoothly."

William B. Lawrence, dean of her alma mater, Perkins School of Theology, says Carcaño holds church members accountable for ministry for "those persons who live at the margins of society."

Others, however, say that Carcaño's views represent only a minority of the church. According to Mark Tooley, president of the conservative Washington-based Institute on Religion and Democracy, Methodists are already defecting at an alarming rate, and the liberal teaching embodied by Carcaño and others is a main reason.

When she was appointed president of the UMC's Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops, Carcaño promised to "challenge statements or actions that offend, denigrate or exclude any person because of the color of their skin, their economic

circumstance, their political persuasion, their gender or their sexual orientation."

Tooley said Carcaño's opinions on immigration align with the church's official positions except for her opposition to the church's teaching against gay marriage and gay ministers.

But for Carcaño, it's all part of her belief in an egalitarian view of God's grace that should always be shared with those on the margins—of society or church life. —Lilly Fowler, RNS

Statue of Rosa Parks unveiled in Capitol

A bronze statue of civil rights heroine Rosa Parks was recently unveiled at the U.S. Capitol on a day for members of her African Methodist Episcopal Church to celebrate one of their own.

President Obama, capping an hour-long ceremony in Statuary Hall, recalled the desegregation of public buses in Montgomery, Alabama, after a yearlong boycott that was sparked by Parks's simple act of defiance: refusing to move to the back of the bus.

"And with that victory, the entire edifice of segregation, like the ancient walls of Jericho, began to slowly come tumbling down," he said before hundreds gathered just outside the Capitol Rotunda on February 27.

As Parks was hailed for her civil rights achievements, members and leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal Church celebrated Parks taking her place among the monuments to American icons from every state and walk of life.

Parks was a church stewardess, one who helped with communion and baptisms in her local AME congregation in Detroit, and also a deaconess, the highest position for a laywoman in the denomination. She died in 2005 at age 92.

"It's special to us because the AME Church was founded, really, on issues of social justice and equality, and so her actions actually help us to keep that legacy alive even to this day," said Bishop Reginald T. Jackson, chairman of the AME Church's Commission on Social Action. "Her learning and her teaching



ROSA PARKS

CIVIL RIGHTS HEROINE: A bronze statue of civil rights leader Rosa Parks was unveiled February 27 at the U.S. Capitol, a day for her fellow members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church to celebrate one of their own.

in the AME Church served her well when she had to make a very important decision, and she made that decision I don't believe just for herself but . . . for a lot of other people."

Each state can send two statues of famous citizens for display in the Capitol, but the 2,700-pound Rosa Parks statue was commissioned by Congress—the first since 1873—and is the first full-sized statue of an African-American in the Capitol complex. A bust of Martin Luther King Jr. has been displayed in the Rotunda since 1986.

Parks's religious ties were not lost on the political leaders who gathered to honor her in a ceremony that was bookended by prayers by the Senate and House chaplains. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi noted that Parks's mother sang her a hymn of freedom that became "the anthem of her life," while House Speaker John Boehner recalled she held to the gospel and said God "was everything to me."

The AME Church started a nonprofit in hopes of acquiring Parks's archives, which have been housed for several years in a warehouse owned by New York auction house Guernsey. Parks's estate has been the subject of a legal debate, but the estimated \$10 million archive remains unsold.

Within the archive is evidence of Parks's faith, from sermon notes on church bulletins to her white stewardess dress and black stewardess hat. "We are still hopeful that the AME Church can be a part of preserving Rosa Parks's legacy," said Jackie Dupont-Walker, director of the church's Social Action Commission.

AME Church officials claim Parks as a member of their denomination, but other churches have paid her tribute, most notably the Washington National Cathedral with a stone carving of Parks. In the 1980s, Parks visited Harlem's storied Abyssinian Baptist Church when Derrick Harkins was a member of the staff.

"Of all of the incredibly celebrated luminaries, as you can only imagine we would often have at the church, I can honestly say that her being there really was for so many people an incredible high point," recalled Harkins, now pastor of Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in Washington. "The fact that Rosa Parks approached her calling to the civil rights movement with that unique reserve and dignity—I think a lot of people, a lot of church folk, said, 'You know what? That's the kind of resolve that I can have.'"

AME leaders have been pushing parishioners to buy the Rosa Parks commemorative postage stamp. Retired AME bishop Carolyn Tyler Guidry, who had to call around before finding a post office that hadn't sold out of the stamp, said Parks wrote about being inspired by Bishop Richard Allen, who founded the denomination after being born a slave.

"She talks about Richard Allen being her hero," said Guidry. "That was something that inspired and encouraged her as a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. This was her heritage."

Guidry said she looks forward to bringing her granddaughters on a pilgrimage to pay homage at the new statue. "She is one that I would take my granddaughters to see and to talk about," she said, "because I want them

to be encouraged as young African-American women to stand up for what you believe and to make your life count for something." —Adelle M. Banks, RNS

Clinton asks justices to overturn law he signed

It's not every day that an ex-president asks the Supreme Court to strike down a law he signed.

That's what Bill Clinton did with the Defense of Marriage Act, which defines marriage as between a man and a woman—and which the high court will rule on this year in a landmark moment for the gay marriage movement.

The justices must decide whether the Defense of Marriage Act "is consistent with the principles of a nation that honors freedom, equality and justice above all, and is therefore constitutional," Clinton wrote in the *Washington Post*. He adds: "As the president who signed the act into law, I have come to believe that DOMA is contrary to those principles and, in fact, incompatible with our Constitution."

Clinton says that when he signed the law in 1996, "it was a very different time." No state then recognized same-sex marriage, but some were considering it—and congressional opponents were proposing "quite draconian" responses, the 42nd president writes.

"As a bipartisan group of former senators stated in their March 1 amicus brief to the Supreme Court, many supporters of the bill known as DOMA believed that its passage 'would defuse a movement to enact a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, which would have ended the debate for a generation or more,'" Clinton states.

Now nine states and the District of Columbia sanction gay marriage, but same-sex couples even there are denied rights available to others, Clinton notes; they "cannot file their taxes jointly, take unpaid leave to care for a sick or injured spouse or receive equal family health and pension benefits as federal civilian employees."

The Supreme Court decision is expected in late June. —David Jackson, *USA Today*

American Baptists, CBF discuss closer cooperation

Author and activist Tony Campolo brokered unpublicized dialogue early this year between heads of two national Baptist groups that share much in common, according to officials of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Leaders of American Baptist Churches USA and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship met in Pennsylvania and Georgia to explore closer cooperation between the two groups, interim CBF coordinator Pat Anderson told the CBF Coordinating Council in late February.

Anderson has filled in since last summer's retirement of former executive coordinator Daniel Vestal and will stay on to ease the transition for his successor, Suzii Paynter, who began work March 1.

Anderson took part in a short meeting at ABCUSA headquarters in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, a Philadelphia suburb. Campolo, an American Baptist minister who spoke at the 2003 CBF General Assembly in 2003, has "expressed his deep desire for CBF and ABC to be one," said Anderson.

"He said his life dream is for it to be the Cooperative American Baptist Churches of the USA, or something like that," Anderson said. "He said he real-

izes that at the age of 76, that dream will probably not come true in his lifetime, but he just wanted to focus on that dream."

Continued Anderson: "We had a nice conversation about things we hold in common, much of our shared history and projecting the things that we should focus on together, because we have similar issues and problems and challenges as denominational entities. Nothing concrete came out of that conversation, other than just an intentional desire for us to figure out ways to work more closely together as Cooperative Baptists and American Baptists."

After the half-day meeting at ABC headquarters, American Baptist general secretary Roy Medley brought a similar delegation to visit the CBF Resource Center in Atlanta February 5. Anderson said leadership teams of both organizations "made the commitment to each other that we would be more in touch with each other and would be looking to each other's people and organization for ways that we can interact."

Anderson said Campolo, professor emeritus of sociology at Eastern University and founder and president of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education, expressed disappointment that neither American Baptists nor Cooperative Baptists are doing enough with young people, a key to future vitality of both organizations.

He proposed a national event bringing youth groups from both American Baptist and CBF churches together for a concert and a Bible conference that would call on young people to commit to two years of service in Christian work, Anderson reported. Campolo also envisioned collaboration between American Baptist and CBF-affiliated colleges and divinity schools to provide internships and student engaged-learning opportunities.

American Baptists and the CBF already have a track record of collaboration. The two groups have jointly appointed missionaries, and they met together in 2007 in Washington. They have partnered in disaster response, and both belong to the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and the Baptist World Alliance. —ABP

Catholic bishops opposed lesbian rights in bill that protects women

A NEWLY authorized Violence Against Women Act, signed by President Obama on March 7, was opposed by five key Catholic bishops for fear it would subvert traditional views of marriage and gender and compromise the religious freedom of groups that aid victims of human trafficking.

Intended to protect women from domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking, the act allows the federal government to spend money to treat victims and prosecute offenders. But for the first time since the original act became law in 1994, it spells out that no person may be excluded from the law's protections because of "sexual orientation" or "gender identity"—specifically covering lesbian, transgender and bisexual women.

That language disturbs several bishops who head key committees within the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that deal with, among other issues, marriage, the laity, youth and religious liberty.

"These two classifications are unnecessary to establish the just protections due to all persons. They undermine the meaning and importance of sexual difference," the bishops said

March 6 in a statement from the USCCB.

"They are unjustly exploited for purposes of marriage redefinition, and marriage is the only institution that unites a man and a woman with each other and with any children born from their union," the statement continued.

The bishops also take issue with the lack of "conscience protection" for faith-based groups that help victims of human trafficking, an addition they sought after the Obama administration decided in 2011 to discontinue funding for a Catholic group that works with trafficking victims, many of whom were forced to work as prostitutes.

The administration instead funded other groups that, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, could provide a full range of women's health services, including referrals for contraception or abortion, both of which the Catholic Church opposes.

In February, the bill passed the Senate 78 to 22, and the House passed it 286 to 138 with no Democrats in opposition. Some Republicans objected to the bill for reasons similar to the bishops'. —Lauren Markoe, RNS

Armenia struggles to absorb Christian refugees from Syria

Sarkiss Rshdouni escaped the fighting in the besieged Syrian city of Aleppo months ago but cannot shake memories of what he witnessed.

"I was with a friend when I heard gunshots," said Rshdouni, who is among hundreds of thousands of people who have fled the war in his homeland. "It was fast—second by second, the sound was getting closer. I saw mass shooting, people running."

Aleppo is home to more than 80 percent of Syria's Armenian community, and those who are still there remain at the center of the battle for control of the country.

Syrian rebels recently pushed back army defenses and moved closer to the country's second-largest airport just outside Aleppo. The airport stopped commercial flights weeks ago because of the fighting, but it is used by Syrian president Bashar Assad's military to resupply troops and launch airstrikes against rebel positions.

The uprising against Assad, which erupted nearly two years ago, has left more than 2 million people internally displaced and pushed 650,000 more to seek refuge abroad in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

Aleppo, Syria's largest city, has been engulfed in fighting for months between government forces and opposition militias, including al-Qaeda-allied extremists. People there are dealing with shortages of food, medicine and electricity during the coldest winter in the Middle East in two decades.

The Christian-Armenian community in Syria is relatively small—between 60,000 and 100,000 people, according to estimates—but its history has added to its unease. Armenians in Syria are descendants of people who fled to Syria after escaping a genocide against Armenians in Ottoman Turkey during World War I.

Many worry that the same can happen in Syria, where the Christian Armenians are again at the mercy of Muslim factions at war, and they are desperate to get out.

"Syrian Air has rerouted all flights because of the conflict in Aleppo," said

Gevorg Abrahamyan, press secretary of Zvartnots International Airport in Armenia. "There's a flight arriving once a week now from Latakia [in Syria] to Yerevan."

Upon arrival in the capital city of Yerevan, the refugees still face a struggle. Armenia is a former Soviet republic that's landlocked by Turkey, Georgia and Iran. Unemployment is estimated at 20 percent, according to the International Monetary Fund. —Diane Markosian, *USA Today*

Scottish cardinal admits to sexual misconduct

Days after pulling out of the conclave to elect the next pope and vowing to fight the charges against him, disgraced Scottish cardinal Keith O'Brien admitted on March 3 to inappropriate "sexual conduct."

O'Brien, who until his resignation was the highest-ranking Roman Catholic cleric in England and Scotland, had served as archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh for the last seven years and was made a cardinal in 2003.

After a week of turmoil among Scotland's 700,000 Catholics, the cardinal said in a statement released by the Scottish Catholic Media Office in Glasgow that "there have been times that my sexual conduct has fallen below the standards expected of me as a priest, archbishop and cardinal."

He asked for forgiveness for those he had "offended" and from the entire church. "I will now spend the rest of my life in retirement," O'Brien said. "I will play no further part in the public life of the Catholic Church in Scotland."

O'Brien resigned days earlier after explosive charges from unnamed accusers that he had made "inappropriate" sexual advances to four men, three of them priests and one now a former seminarian, starting in the 1980s.

Pope Benedict XVI accepted O'Brien's resignation—which was already on file and due to take effect within a matter of months—with unusual haste in one of his last official acts before resigning the papacy on February 28.

O'Brien said he would skip the conclave to elect a new pope in order to avoid becoming a distraction or media

spectacle, leaving Catholics in the United Kingdom without a vote in the conclave.

Archbishop Philip Tartaglia of Glasgow has taken over temporary leadership of O'Brien's former archdiocese, calling the revelations "painful and distressing." —Trevor Grundy, RNS

People

■ Fuller Theological Seminary, the nation's largest theological school with more than 4,000 students, has chosen a faculty expert on preaching as its new president of the multicampus based in Pasadena, California. **Mark Labberton**, who has directed the Lloyd John Ogilvie Institute of Preaching at Fuller since 2009 after 16 years as senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley, California, accepted the call by Fuller's board of trustees on March 12. **Richard J. Mouw** announced last May that he would retire as president this June, then return in a faculty role following a study leave during the 2013–14 academic year. Labberton, who will be the seminary's fifth president since its founding in 1947, has a doctorate from Cambridge University, held posts with the John Stott Ministries and has written articles for the *CENTURY*, *Christianity Today* and *Leadership Journal*. His most recent book is *The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbor* (2010).

■ A leader in a resurgent Calvinism movement popular among Southern Baptists resigned from a church-planting network he helped launch 30 years ago amid reports of internal strife and a lawsuit alleging a cover-up of sexual and physical abuse of children. **C. J. Mahaney**, founder of Sovereign Grace Ministries, will step down as president effective April 12 to focus on being pastor of a new church launched in Louisville, Kentucky. The resignation coincides with the introduction of a proposed new polity statement for the network's 80 churches described as "evangelical, Reformed and charismatic." Mahaney said the new model "will serve our family of churches for decades to come." But Brent Detwiler, a blogger and former Mahaney confidante, said Mahaney was asked to resign by a board concerned with damage control.

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, April 7
Acts 5:27-32 (ESV)

DISOBEDIENCE CAME hard for a nice girl like me. I was taught to respect authority, which I did, despite bumper stickers urging us to question it. I did my homework, kept to the speed limit and came home on time. I rarely got in trouble, though I admired those who did, like the people who joined picket lines or burned their draft cards.

War protests were my first serious encounters with purposeful disobedience. As classmates faced being shipped out to Vietnam, I developed a deep respect for those who heeded the call to disobedience. I watched leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. challenge unjust laws and professors risk censure or worse to speak out against those who controlled the biggest war machine in history. My brother and several friends wrote statements of conscientious objection that helped me see the link between resistance and faith. I began to question authority—who had it, by what right, with what limits. A tectonic shift took place in my theology. I learned to live with more ambiguity and to recognize how the paradoxes at the heart of Jesus' teaching were meant to keep us wrestling with moral complexity rather than simply applying rules. I learned that even legitimately appointed leaders need to be challenged and unjust laws broken.

Discerning when to disobey can be tricky. I'm not sure any of us should undertake it alone; it's much harder than acting on principle, which can lead to a self-righteousness that's sometimes hard to see in oneself when a principle needs defending and we appoint ourselves to the task. When the disciples stand before the high priests they don't invoke principle. They speak from a lived relationship with God, whom they know with an intimacy and certainty that trumps all other claims to obedience. It's not just a spirit of resistance that drives them, but irrepressible love. The logic of that love is fairly simple: here we stand. We can do no other.

I am struck not just by their courage in speaking truth to power but by the simplicity and clarity of their response to accusation. With such clarity there is little need for defiance. Their point is not to argue in their own defense but to bear witness to the one they must obey. *Must* is a key word: what compels them can't be argued away because it is not matter for argument. Bearing witness is not the same as making a case.

I am even more struck by the disciples' freedom. The high priests don't have power over them; the disciples live outside their jurisdiction: as they are no longer under the law, the agents of the law cannot bind them. No longer afraid of death, they are free indeed. In a few bold sentences they tell a story

that is more invitation than defense, offering great good news to the very people who killed their Beloved. Their freedom reminds me of a survivor of three concentration camps who said, "When you've really faced and accepted your own death, you are free." Hers was a powerful testimony to what it might mean to "be not afraid."

The remarkable popularity of Rick Warren's *A Purpose-Driven Life* suggests that we long for a deeper sense of purpose. Discernment of our individual gifts helps define our purposes, but another necessary dimension of the process is to consider our calling to be the body of Christ—to "put on the mind" that cannot be manipulated by propaganda or threats of political retribution. Love provides the sense of purpose that enables us to say, as the 12-year-old Jesus did, "Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" That business agenda is fairly simple: do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with our God—and speak truth to power because the truth is good news. Also, challenge those who imprison and torture the innocent, who expropriate land and means of production from the poor, who profit from war or slave labor, who traffic in the bodies of women, who destroy soil, water and mountaintops or sell weapons to oppressors. Our business is liberating ourselves and others from lies into truth and from greed into generous love.

I am grateful for those who stand like the disciples in holy disobedience before wayward authorities. On his recent Do the Math tour, Bill McKibben urged divestment from companies that feed our addiction to fossil fuels. He invited us to imagine floating in a small vessel near the mighty oil tankers whose payloads have destroyed so much habitat and then imagine "turning the ship around." A self-described "professional bummer outer," McKibben delivered his painful message about the state of the earth with good cheer, still confident that light shines even in the great darkness of our time.

He is not alone, and we are not. I take comfort in the company of many whose clarity clarifies my own purposes and whose love of God reignites my own: journalists like Amy Goodman, Chris Hedges and Robert Fisk; writers like Wendell Berry, Barbara Kingsolver and Mary Oliver; activists like John Dear and Helen Caldicott; teachers, pastors, laborers and doctors without borders who are anchored in conviction. I need their clarity. I think of the disciples standing together before the high priests as an image of solidarity that will see them through even their singular and violent deaths, members of one body that may be crucified but not defeated. Hope is hard if you're awake and politically aware, but it has its harbingers, whose vigorous and holy disobedience points a way to wild possibilities.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, April 14

John 21:1–19 (ESV)

ONE OF MY favorite lines in *Hamlet* is the prince's reminder to Horatio, who is uncertain what to make of a ghost, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." I've spent much of my life among academics, Christian and otherwise, many of whom are skittish about references to mystical moments, prescient dreams, "thin space," telepathy, visions or inexplicable healings. Curiously, even those whose faith is solidly scriptural often shy away from conversations about boundary experiences or avoid the topic of angels.

But there they are. Angels, visions of animals on a sheet, fiery chariots, withering fig trees and demonic voices. And there's Jesus a few days after his bloody death cooking up breakfast on the beach and walking through locked doors, looking like a stranger, then suddenly looking like his familiar self. And there's Paul, blind and bruised after a close encounter with heavenly light. You can't write these things off, and you can't reduce them to parable or confine them to the merely symbolic; much as I respect parables and symbols and eschew flat-footed literalism, some stories challenge us to stretch our understanding of plausibility.

Though literalism is a dangerous habit of mind, I appreciate Augustine's wisdom in suggesting that the work of interpretation begins in entertaining the literal meaning of the word. Similarly, I appreciate scientists who are able to maintain an open moment of silence in response to inexplicable events before dismissing them or insisting on an empirical explanation. The discipline of pausing over the implausible helps preserve the humility of Hamlet's reminder and of Mary's amazed question: "How can these things be?" The answer to that question, which has been echoed by astrophysicists, geneticists and doctors who know that mystery is involved in healing, is multidimensional. There are ways of being that lie beyond the jurisdiction of the five senses; we know, not just from theology but also from science, that our senses account for only a limited part of what is actual. To reach beyond them we need mathematics and particle physics, bioenergetics and poetry, abstract art and good biblical theology. We need people whose callings take them to those borderlands and who deploy their imaginations in the service of barely conceivable truth.

One example of such a calling is a story about a shy congregant who asked her pastor if she might accompany him to the hospital and pray with patients. He consented, a little surprised, and over ensuing months witnessed extraordinary healings that seemed to

result directly from her prayers and laying-on of hands. When he asked her what she thought was happening (how could these things be?), she admitted that she had thought for some time that she had a gift of healing but wasn't sure how to use it. Healings happen. Information is transmitted and change effected in subtle and immeasurable ways. Postresurrection stories may testify not only to the resurrection but also to the fact that there are more things in heaven and earth than we generally take into account.

I appreciate Fritjof Capra's writing about links between particle physics and mysticism, the way Big Bang theorists bring new meaning to the Genesis story, and the way testimonies to heavenly apparitions and saints with stigmata and answers to scientific problems that appear in dreams challenge a too-narrow understanding of "heaven and earth." I wonder sometimes if conditioned resistance to simple-minded literalism may keep us from considering how many implausible things might actually be literally true, and how, if they are, we might need to recognize at least a sixth sense or a fourth dimension (physicists say there are at least 11), and how string theory, black holes, telepathy and energetic healings may deserve more than a nervous shrug.

Our senses discern only a limited part of what is actual.

Poets and artists help us imagine those other dimensions and altered states. Van Gogh offers a visible reminder of how matter verges on energy and how energy gathers into form: in his paintings, mountains crest like waves and trees turn to light at the edges. As Emerson put it, "All things swim and glitter." C. S. Lewis describes creatures on the planet Malacandra who live at a higher frequency and have subtle, barely visible bodies. And in a whimsical film by Wim Wenders called *Wings of Desire*, two angels are sent to "hang around" earthly folk. They attempt only the subtlest kinds of interventions but somehow exert palpable influence on humans who mostly remain unaware.

On our tiny planet, in this segment of history that lies between God's self-revelation in Christ and the fulfillment and end of history, our assignment seems to be to find our way around this thin layer of breathable air and arable soil—stewarding, noticing and narrating what we see in ways that keep us humbly attentive to the "hints and guesses" that lead us toward a wider world where more things are possible than are dreamt of in our philosophies—and where a meal is being prepared for us.

The author is Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, who is the author of Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies and Reading Like a Serpent.

On abortion and homosexuality

Caught in the middle

by Wendell Berry

IN THE PRESENT political atmosphere it is assumed that everybody must be on one of only two sides, liberal or conservative. It doesn't matter that neither of these labels signifies much in the way of intellectual responsibility or that both are paralyzed in the face of the overpowering issue of our time: the destruction of land and people, of life itself, by means either economic or military. What does matter is that a person should choose one side or the other, accept the "thinking" and the "positions" of that side and its institutions and be so identified forevermore. How you vote is who you are.

We appear thus to have evolved into a sort of teenage culture of wishful thinking, of contending "positions," oversimplified and absolute, requiring no knowledge and no thought, no loss, no tragedy, no strenuous effort, no bewilderment, no hard choices.

Depending on the issues, I am often in disagreement with both of the current political sides. I am especially in disagreement with them when they invoke the power and authority of government to enforce the moral responsibilities of persons. The appeal to government is made, whether or not it is defensible, when families and communities fail to meet their moral responsibilities. Between the two moralities now contending for political dominance, the middle ground is so shaken as to be almost no ground at all. The middle ground is the ground once occupied by communities and families whose coherence and authority have now been destroyed, with the connivance of both sides, by the economic determinism of the corporate industrialists. The fault of both sides is that, after accepting and abetting the dissolution of the necessary structures of family and community as an acceptable "price of progress," they turn to government to fill the vacancy, or they allow government to be sucked into the vacuum. This, I think, explains both Prohibition and the war on drugs, to name two failed government remedies.

To believe, as I do, that families and communities are necessary despite their present decrepitude is to be in the middle and to be most uncomfortable there. My stand nevertheless is practical. I do not think a government should be asked or expected to do what a government cannot do. A government cannot effectively exercise familial authority, nor can it effectively enforce communal or personal standards of moral conduct.

The collapse of families and communities—so far, more or less disguised as "mobility" or "growth" or "progress" or "liberation"—is in fact a social catastrophe. It leaves individ-

uals subject to no requirements or restraints except those imposed by government. The liberal individual desires freedom from restraints upon personal choices and acts, which often has extended to freedom from familial and communal responsibilities. The conservative individual desires freedom from restraints upon economic choices and acts, which often extends to freedom from social, ecological and even economic responsibilities. Preoccupied with these degraded freedoms, both sides have refused to look straight at the dangers and the failures of government-by-corporations.

Liberals and conservatives fight with rickety absolutes.

The Christian or social conservatives who wish for government protection of their version of family values have been seduced by the conservatives of corporate finance who wish for government protection of their religion of personal wealth earned in contempt for families. The liberals, calling for some restraints upon incorporated wealth, wish for government enlargement of their semireligion of personal rights and liberties. One side espouses family values pertaining to homes that are empty all day every day. The other promotes liberation that vouchsafes little actual freedom and no particular responsibility. And so we are talking about a populace in which nearly everybody is needy, greedy, envious, angry and alone. We are talking therefore about a politics of mutual estrangement, in which the two sides go at each other with the fervor of extreme righteousness in defense of rickety absolutes that cannot be compromised.

Nowhere has this callow politics asserted itself more thoughtlessly and noisily than on the so-called rights of abortion and homosexual marriage. The real issue here is the politicization of personal or private life, and inevitably, given the absence of authentic political discourse or dialogue, the reduction of the issues to two absolute positions. In addition to distracting from interests authentically public

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and political, the politicization of personal life, involving as it must the publicization of privacy, is inhumane and inherently tyrannical.

After Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* was published in the West and Pasternak received the Nobel Prize in 1958, thus earning the Soviet government's reprisal, Thomas Merton wrote:

Communism is not at home with nonpolitical categories, and it cannot deal with a phenomenon which is not in some way political. It is characteristic of the singular logic of Stalinist-Marxism that when it incorrectly diagnoses some phenomenon as "political," it corrects the error by forcing the thing to *become* political. (*Disputed Questions*)

Now, after many decades of anticomunism, Merton's sentences have come remarkably to be descriptive of our own politics. Maybe people who focus their minds for a long time upon enmity finally begin to resemble their enemies. This has happened before. It is deeply embedded in the logic of warfare.

Unlike the proabortion side, I think abortion is killing.

Whatever the cause, we seem to have become as adept as the old Soviet Union at politicizing the nonpolitical. Most notably, by the connivances of both political sides, we have invented a politics of sexuality, which, by the standards of our own political tradition, is a contradiction in terms. Or it is if there is to be a continuing political distinction between public life and private life. This distinction, after all, is the basis of the freedoms affirmed by the First Amendment, which holds essentially that people's thoughts and beliefs are of no legitimate interest to the government. The government is not in charge of our personal lives, our private affections, our prayers or our political opinions. It is not in charge of our souls. Those who formed our government also limited it, forbidding it any freehold in our homes or in our minds.

I am as ready as any so-called conservative to worry about

big government, though I would remember that government has gotten big in the much-needed effort to regulate big corporations and to help their victims. To my fear of big government I add my at least equal fear of unlimited government, which is to say total government. It is not entirely surprising that after our long, costly resistance to communist dictatorship, we should now see the rise of passions and excuses tending toward capitalist dictatorship. The most insidious of these passions tends toward state religion and government regulation of private behavior.

The politics of sexuality has to do with public disagreements about rights that, however valid, are newly proclaimed, obscure in origin, extremely controversial, and productive of conflicts that probably are not politically resolvable—the prime example being the apparently unendable conflict over abortion.

Not so long ago abortion was illegal in the United States. It was illegal, one must suppose, because of an innate aversion to a woman's destruction of her own child. And then the Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) that abortion, within certain limits, was legal. The ruling is based on the right to privacy under the 14th Amendment and, more remarkably and controversially, on the proposition that a human fetus is not legally a person and therefore is not eligible for the protections guaranteed by that amendment. This distinction between a fetus and a person is, to common sense, arbitrary and therefore inevitably a source of trouble. *Fetus*, to begin with, is a technical term which once was rarely used by pregnant women, who had conventionally and naturally referred to the creature forming in their wombs as a *baby*, which is to say a human being, a person. The abortion debate involves endless, unendable disagreement about issues such as when a fetus becomes a human or a person, when life begins, when or whether abortion should be legal, whether we should call it "killing" or "termination." Some enlightened people hold in derision the idea that life begins at conception. But if life does not begin at conception, then we are at the beginning of a kind of sophistry: an argument about when life may be *said* to begin.

The right to have an abortion has been popularly justified as a woman's right to control her own body. Such a right seems to

be implied by a number of other rights, but only recently has it been stated in this way. So stated, it is somewhat confusing, for many of our laws, legal and moral, *require* one to control one's body—to restrain it, for instance, from killing the body of another person, except of course when ordered to do so by the government. To say when and why a requirement may become a right, and when and why the requirement or the right should be suspended or opposed, needs a lot of spelling out—if such a spelling out is possible.

The facts remain, on one side, that abortions are still proscribed by some religious traditions and the old aversion is still felt by many people, and on the other side, that the legalization of abortion answers a need desperately felt for real and pressing reasons by many women, and legal abortion should at least put an end to illegal abortions badly performed in bad circumstances by incompetent and disreputable people.

Also involved are questions of ultimate seriousness and importance: questions of life and death that exceed the competence of human intelligence and are forever veiled in mystery. The trains of causation run quickly out of sight. I know a man who said, plausibly, "Life begins with erection." Elders used to refer young people to a time "when you were just a look in your mother's eyes." But when I asked the geneticist Wes Jackson, "Does life begin at conception?" he replied, "Life continues at conception." This, I felt, was at last a statement sufficiently serious.

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In making any choice, we choose for the future, and so all our choices involve us in mystery and in a kind of tragedy. To choose to have a baby, to abort a fetus, to save a life, to destroy a life is to make a whole change on the basis of partial knowledge. One chooses in light of what one knows now about the past and thus changes the future inevitably and forever. What would have been, had the choice been different, will never be known.

To reduce this complexity and mystery to a public contest between two absolutes seems to wrong everything involved. Some equivocation seems natural and appropriate because one is attending to two possibilities, both unknown. Saints, heroes and great artists began as fetuses. So did tyrants, torturers and mass murderers. Choices do not invariably cut cleanly between good and evil. Sometimes we poor humans must choose between two competing goods, sometimes between two evils. Responsibility or circumstances will require us to choose. But we cannot choose to be unbewildered or not to grieve.

The theologian William E. Hull, worrying over the destructive animosities that divide religious organizations, asked, "How can we avoid the wrangling that breeds hostility?" And he answered: "By seeking clarity rather than victory" (*Beyond the Barriers*). This sounds exactly right to me, and I find little clarity in the public argument about abortion. I know that both sides are made up of individual humans whose thoughts

and feelings may differ in significant ways from the public positions of their sides. But the problem with those positions as they are generalized and vented into the political atmosphere is that they substitute simplicity for clarity. By separating the statistical facts of abortion from the lived experience—from the mystery, bewilderment and suffering that attend it—the simplicity becomes obscure and heartless. To the proabortion side, abortion is simply a right, the creature to be aborted is a fetus, the act itself is termination of a pregnancy by a forthright medical procedure. To the antiabortion side, abortion is simply a wrong to be refused or opposed in obedience to a moral or religious law that ought to be the law of the land. Both sides have failed to get at either the truth of human suffering or the possibility of human compassion.

The issue, I think, can be clarified only by imagining a woman to whom an abortion is one of two heartbreak alternatives, one of which she must choose alone, and between which, however she chooses, she will remain emotionally divided perhaps for the rest of her life. This woman, troubling as she is to the political atmosphere of opposed ab-

solutes, cannot be admitted by either side into the public argument. But her example is starkly clarifying. Her absence from the argument stupefies both sides.

I am unsure of the whereabouts or even the possibility of truth in the abortion strife, but I, with perhaps a good many others, am somewhere in the middle, where I see no chance of a public reconciliation. In fairness, we have to acknowledge that within the experience and history of abortion there must be many shades and mixtures of right and wrong. As in the human condition generally, we are not dealing with a choice between a shadowless light and utter darkness.

I have said several times that I am opposed to abortion except when it is necessary to save the mother's life. I stick to that, for I still feel strongly the old aversion. Unlike the proabortion side, I think that abortion is killing. What else could it be? And I think that the creature killed is a human being, for it can be a being of no other kind, and it is not a non-being. But I feel just as strongly an aversion to our life-destroying economy and way of life, and every day increases

There should be no law either for or against abortion.

our need to cherish life in all its forms. I oppose the official killings that bear the names of justice and defense and also the killing that is a cost or by-product of certain industrial enterprises. I do, however, recognize the cruelty that is inherent and inescapable in the life of this world, in which no creature lives but at the expense of other creatures, as I recognize right and wrong ways of exacting and recompensing such costs.

But when I have spoken of my opposition to abortion, I hope I have never neglected to say that I can imagine circumstances in which I would willingly aid and comfort a girl or a woman getting an abortion. And here I arrive at what is for me the moral difficulty, even the moral obscurity, of this problem: though I can say that, in some circumstances, I would willingly help somebody get an abortion, I cannot say that I would willingly aid and abet a murder.

Whatever one may think of a woman's right to control her own body, the inexpressibly intimate involvement of her own body in a woman's decision to have an abortion is a real and urgent consideration, and for a man it is a special one. That it does not involve, and could never have involved, *my* body does not invalidate my belief that abortion is wrong, but it does require me to be carefully aware of the bodily difference. Whereas a person's demonstrated willingness to kill another person already born requires us to look upon that killer as a

public menace, a woman's decision to kill the baby in her womb does not require us to look upon her as a menace to anybody else. In fact we *don't* look upon her in that way.

There are four possible legislative solutions to the abortion controversy:

1. Abortion could be forbidden absolutely, with no exceptions.
2. It could be forbidden, with specified exceptions.
3. It could be permitted, with specified exceptions.
4. We could permit it without exception, which to me means that we would have no law related specifically to abortion.

The first of these would outrage the proabortion side, it would settle the controversy merely by ignoring it, it is immitigably harsh, and it makes little sense. Absolute forbidding would choose the life of the unborn child over any and all other considerations, including that of the life of the mother. The government thus would abandon any obligation to protect the mother's life in order to protect the life of the child. If, for want of an abortion, mother and child *both* should die, then the state would accomplish no good at all except for the pacification of fanatics.

Any law forbidding abortion would be ineffective, and it could easily do harm. To forbid an established practice for which the demand is widespread and the supply dispersed and readily available would be virtually to license an illicit and lucrative economy that would reward the greed and enterprise of the worst people. Such a situation undermines government authority and brings law enforcement into disrespect.

The two middle solutions, as opposed to an outright ban, would require niggling official regulation of the conduct of individual persons, conduct at least semiprivate. This would require an increase in police power that would be expensive and also a danger to everybody's freedom. We could, for example, make a law forbidding abortion except to save the mother's life, but what would we mean by "the mother's life"? Would it be denoted only by her vital signs or, more reasonably, by her ability to live and thrive in the world—in which case the definition of her life would include her economic life, the life of her family (if she has one), even the life of her community (if she has one). For another example, we could make a law permitting abortion except during the third trimester. But

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this would require a lot of official watching. And who is to say exactly when the third trimester begins? Such legislating can only strand everybody, including the government, in permanently painful and dangerous confusion.

The problem in forbidding or permitting with exceptions is that the exceptions apparently cannot be decided upon by precise determinants, but rather by "approximate" or "appropriate" judgments by experts. The language of *Roe v. Wade*, as the ruling implicitly acknowledges, is vague and uneasy. What exactly is meant, with respect to abortion, by *life, conception, viability, privacy and person?* *Roe v. Wade* does not, to my

Heterosexual marriage needs practicing, not defending.

mind, settle the meaning of any of those words. The legal definition of a person evaporated when the Supreme Court defined a corporation as a person. If a corporation is a person, contrary to all previous usage and to common sense, then personhood can be conferred upon virtually anything merely by decree. Issues are thus quickly carried not just into vagueness but beyond the bounds of language.

I am going to take the risk, therefore, of saying that there should be *no* law either for or against abortion. Like certain other wrongs—various addictions, let us say—this one is more

personal than public and would be best dealt with by the persons immediately involved.

This is my attempt to make a statement on abortion that is reasonably complete—and that, in result, may be necessarily incomplete. I should add that I may find further reasons that will require me to revise. To have a mind, I think, depends upon one's willingness to change it.

Regarding homosexual marriage, the fault that I again must acknowledge is that what I have said before has been incomplete. As far as I remember, I have made only two public statements about this issue. My argument, much abbreviated both times, was that sexual practices of consenting adults ought not to be subjected to the government's approval or disapproval and that domestic partnerships, in which people who live together and devote their lives to one another, ought to receive the spousal rights, protections and privileges that the government allows to heterosexual couples.

In those two statements I was considering homosexual marriage as an issue of law—with reference to the contention from both sides that marriage is a right to be granted or withheld by the government. This puts me again in the middle but this time with more certainty of my whereabouts and with good reasons to object.

First, this "right to marriage" is still birth-wet. It exists only by reason of its being selectively withheld. Apart from its momentary political expediency there is no reason for it. Whatever one

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may think of all that is presently implied and entailed by the legalization of marriage, surely nobody can claim that marriage is either the government's invention or that the government has an inherent right to determine who may marry.

Second, this right depends upon a curious agreement between liberals and conservatives that human rights originate in government, to be dispensed to the people according to their pleading and at the government's pleasure, implying inescapably that any right, being so expediently the government's gift, can just as expediently be withheld or withdrawn. This flatly contradicts the founding principle of American democracy that human rights are precedent to the government's existence, that the government is established to protect them, and that the government must be restrained from violating them.

Third, it cannot be allowable, under the above principles, for the government, on the pleading of *some* of the people, to establish a right solely for the purpose of withholding it from some other people. If this were to happen, it would amount to a punishment imposed on a disfavored group for no crime except their existence. I don't need to point out that this has happened before.

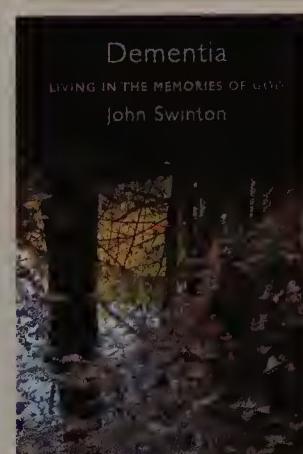
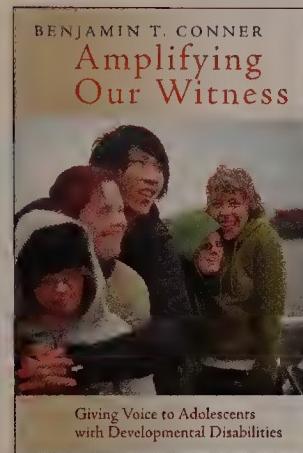
That the liberals, who so often have been rightly anxious about the protection of rights and liberties, should define those rights and liberties as the gifts of a generous and parental government is absurd.

The conservative program on this issue, promoting as it does a constitutional apportionment of rights according to sexual category, in implicit violation of the 15th and 19th Amendments, is more darkly absurd. The theory that accreditation of the sexual practices of individuals is a function proper to a "small" and noninterfering government is comic as well as absurd.

That homosexuals have been denied the right to marry, supposing for the moment that such a right can exist, surely violates the 14th Amendment, which forbids the state to "deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; [or] to deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." There is no need for homosexuals to be granted a right to marry that is at all different from the right of heterosexuals to do so. There is no good reason for the government to treat homosexuals as a special category of persons.

To support their strategy of outlawing homosexual marriage, Christians of a certain disposition have found several ways to categorize homosexuals as a different kind from themselves, who are in the category of heterosexuals and therefore normal and therefore good. They are mindful that the Bible looks upon homosexual acts as sinful or perverse. But it is not clear to me why perversion should have been specifically assigned to homosexuality. The Bible has a lot more to say against fornication and adultery than against homosexuality. If one accepts the 24th and 104th Psalms as scriptural norms, then surface mining and other forms of

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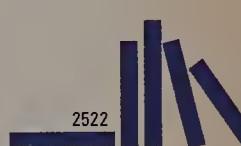
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earth destruction clearly are perversions. If we take the Gospels seriously, how can we not see industrial warfare and its unavoidable massacre of innocents as a most shocking perversion? By the standard of all scripture, neglect of the poor, of widows and orphans, of the sick, the homeless, the insane is an abominable perversion. Jesus taught that hating your neighbor is tantamount to hating God, and yet some Christians hate their neighbors as a matter of policy and are busy hunting biblical justifications for doing so. Are they not perverts in the fullest and fairest sense of that term? And yet none of these offenses, not all of them together, has made as much political-religious noise as homosexual marriage.

Another way to categorize and isolate homosexuals from the general citizenry and the prerogatives of citizenship is to define homosexuality as a disease having a cause that can be discovered and removed or cured by some sort of therapy. This seems most promising as long-term job security for scientists. Ken Kesey once saw an inscription in a men's room: "My mother made me a homosexual." Under it somebody else had written: "If I gave her the yarn would she make me one?" My own speculation is that we will never do much better than that. We will discover that, like all the rest of us, homosexuals are made what they are by their mothers, their fathers, their genes, their germs, their upbringing and their education, by their friends and neighbors, their dwelling places, their time and its culture, by their economic and social status, their personal history, and by history itself.

Yet another such argument is that homosexuality is unnatural. If the nature in question is merely biological—the realm of the ape and the naked ape—that may prove too roomy and accommodating to be of much help. By the standard of that nature, monogamy is unnatural, an artifact of *some* cultures. If it is argued that homosexual marriage cannot be reproductive, is therefore unnatural and should be forbidden, must we not then argue that any childless marriage is unnatural and should be annulled?

Specifically *human* nature, by contrast, has always had a definition more complex and demanding than that of a naked ape. William Blake thought we are made human by being made in the image of God: "For mercy, pity, peace, and love / Is God our father dear; / And mercy, pity, peace, and love / Is man, his child and care" (*Songs of Innocence*, XX). Are homosexuals capable of mercy, pity, peace and love? Some certainly are, as some heterosexuals certainly are. To deny that distinction to homosexuals is to deny categorically that they are human. Oversimplified moral certainties—always requiring hostility, always potentially violent—isolate us from mercy, pity, peace and love and leave

us lonely and dangerous in our misery. The only perfect laws are absolute, but perfect laws are only approximately fitted to imperfect humans. That is why we have needed to think of mercy, and of the spirit, as opposed to the letter, of the law.

One may find the sexual practices of homosexuals to be unattractive or displeasing and therefore unnatural. But anything that can be done in that line by homosexuals can be done, and is done, by heterosexuals. Do we need a political remedy for this? Would conservative Christians like a small government bureau to inspect, approve and certify their sexual behavior? Would they like a colorful tattoo, verifying government approval, on the rumps of lawfully copulating persons? We have the technology, after all, to monitor everybody's sexual behavior, but as far as I can see, so eager an interest in other people's most private intimacy is either prurient or totalitarian or both.

No church can make any kind of marriage.

The oddest of the strategies to condemn and isolate homosexuals is to propose that homosexual marriage is opposed to and a threat to heterosexual marriage—as if the marriage market is about to be cornered and monopolized by homosexuals. If this is not industrial-capitalist paranoia, it at least follows the pattern of industrial-capitalist competitiveness, according to which you *must* destroy the competition. If somebody else wants what you've got—from money to marriage—you must not hesitate to use the government (small, of course) to keep them from getting it.

But if heterosexual marriage is so satisfying to heterosexual couples, why can they not just reside in their satisfaction? So-called traditional marriage, now mostly divested of a traditional household and traditional bonds to a community, is for sure suffering a statistical failure, but this is not the result of a homosexual plot. Heterosexual marriage does not need defending. It only needs to be practiced, which is pretty hard to do just now. But the difficulty is rooted mainly in the val-

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ues and priorities of our industrial-capitalist system, in which every one of us is complicit.

It certainly is possible for a government to withhold the legal perquisites of marriage from any group that it may be persuaded to designate in our present civil cold war. That is mainly to say that a government can forbid its officers to license weddings for people in the designated group.

But a wedding is not a marriage. A wedding is traditionally an exchange of vows of fidelity and love in all circumstances until death. In some circumstances, for some people, a wedding may be a sacrament. But however complicated and costly the preparations, the costumes, the photography and the reception, a wedding is over and done with in a few minutes.

A marriage, by contrast, is the *making* of marriage, by daily effort to live out the vows until death. The vows may be taken seriously or not, broken or not, but there is no way of withholding them from homosexuals. You cannot copyright the vows which a homosexual couple is perfectly free to make. The government cannot forbid them to do so, nor can any church.

Conjugal love, Kierkegaard wrote,

is faithful, constant, humble, patient, long-suffering, indulgent, sincere, contented, vigilant, willing, joyful. All these virtues have the characteristic that they are inward qualifications of the individual. The individual is not fighting with

external foes but fights with himself. . . . Conjugal love does not come with any outward sign . . . with whizzing and bluster, but it is the imperishable nature of a quiet spirit. (*Either/Or*)

No church can *make* a homosexual marriage, because it cannot make any marriage, nor can it withhold any degree of blessedness or sanctity from any pledged couple striving day by day to be at one. If I were one of a homosexual couple, the

Categorical condemnation is the lowest form of hatred.

same as I am one of a heterosexual couple, I would place my faith and hope in the mercy of Christ, not in the judgment of Christians.

Condemnation by category is the lowest form of hatred, for it is cold-hearted and abstract, lacking the heat and even the courage of a personal hatred. Categorical condemnation is the hatred of the mob, which makes cowards brave. And there is nothing more fearful than a religious mob overflowing with righteousness, as there was at the crucifixion and has been before and since. This mob violence can happen only after we have made a categorical refusal of kindness to

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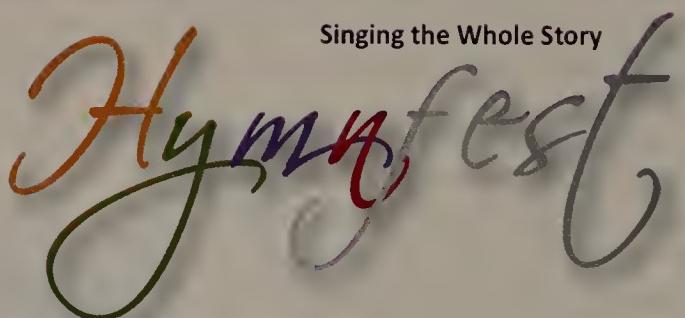
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heretics, foreigners, enemies, or any other group different from ourselves.

Kindness is not a word much at home in current political and religious speech, but it is a rich word and a necessary one. There is good reason to think that we cannot live without it. *Kind* is obviously related to *kin*, but also to *race* and to *nature*. In the Middle Ages *kind* and *nature* were synonyms. *Equal*, in the famous phrase of the Declaration of Independence, could be well translated by these terms: All men are created kin, or of a kind, or of the same race or nature.

Jesus saves the life of the woman taken in adultery by removing her from the category in which her accusers (another mob) have placed her and placing her within kindness, his own kindness first and then that of her accusers: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (KJV).

The accusers take this kindness as a defeat, as we all are too likely to do, and they depart without another word. The brief dialogue that follows is wonderfully animated by Jesus' sense of humor:

"Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?"

"No man, Lord."

"Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."

(John 8:7, 10–11 [KJV])

Good advice—but can we suppose he could have given it without smiling, knowing as he did the vast repertory of sins and the endless human susceptibility?

Within the larger story of the Gospels this story is not exceptional. It does show us Jesus' way of dealing with one of the biblically denominated sins, but he simply reaches out to the woman in her great need as he did many times to many others. In the Gospels the sinfulness of all humans is assumed. It is neediness that is exceptional, and in Jesus' ministry need clearly takes a certain precedence over sin. His kindness is best exemplified by his feedings and healings with no imputation at all of sin or deserving.

But the wealth of this idea of kindness is not exhausted by kindnesses to humans. It is far more encompassing. From some Christians as far back as the 12th century, certainly from farther back in so-called primitive cultures, and from some ecologists of our own time, we have the idea of

a great kindness including and binding together all beings: the living and the nonliving, the plants and animals, the water, the air, the stones. All, ultimately, are of a kind, belonging together, interdependently, in this world. From the point of view of Genesis 1 or of the 104th Psalm, we would say that all are of one kind, one kinship, one nature, because all are *creatures*.

Much happiness, much joy, can come to us from our membership in a kindness so comprehensive and original. It is a shame, as I know from long acquaintance with myself, to be divided from it by the autoerotic pleasure of despising other members.

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How our brains are connected

Wired together

by Andrew Root

SHE'LL GO DOWN in history—at least in our family history—as the best babysitter ever. “Ms. Jess,” as my kids called her, was wise, patient and fun. My kids loved being with her, and we loved leaving them with her because we were more than confident that Jess could not only handle emergencies but just as importantly could see our children and respond to them as persons. She had that gift, and that gift now makes her a wonderful pastor.

But according to my son Owen, her gifts were more mystical, even magical. One day after returning from prekindergarten, like a teenager Owen began rummaging around the kitchen looking for something to eat. Jess, recognizing it was snack time but knowing he should ask before taking anything, questioned him, “Owen, what are you doing?”

“Nothing,” he returned.

“Are you hungry?” she asked.

No response.

Owen then went to the refrigerator, opened it and began peering intently, before pulling open the bottom drawer and searching for something. Ms. Jess then asked more directly, “Owen, are you looking for an apple? Are you hungry for an apple?”

Owen froze, his eyes got big. He turned to Jess, looked at her intently and asked in wonder and apprehension, “How did you know? Can you read my mind or something?”

As human beings we do have the innate ability to read each other’s minds and for others to be on our minds. It is not magic, but it is mystical. Jess was able to attune herself to Owen, to recognize his need, to observe his actions and to interpret his (limited) discourse. Jess was able to recognize Owen as a person and in so doing was able to read him. (She also knew where we kept the apples.)

Our brains are wired to allow us to read each other’s minds, to feel each other’s person. Neuroscience has been looking intently at the brain for decades now, even locating neurological operations of empathy. But before we look at those findings, let’s look at empathy’s evil twin, schadenfreude, which means “to take joy in another’s misfortune.”

Schadenfreude is imaginative, but not for the purpose of feeling another; it doesn’t seek to indwell another but rather to be compared with another. Schadenfreude takes joy in the failures or pain of another because these are sure signs that the other is losing, making you the winner. Schadenfreude hopes that the interests of another aren’t met, and thus we

can feel better about ourselves. We take joy in another’s misfortune, giving us a stance over against them as opposed to with them.

Schadenfreude is the ugly outgrowth of individualism, because individualism fundamentally connects people through competition. In the hot glare of competition empathy is wilted, for persons are no longer focused on their relationships but on the ability to get what they want. And whoever has more of their wants met wins. Competition has no desire for sharing. And because there is no sharing we cannot see each other as persons. Everything becomes an object to compete for. Without sharing, the love of persons is deeply maimed.

Our brains are wired for the ability to indwell other people’s minds.

As Søren Kierkegaard said, there can be no love in comparison, because comparison breaks the empathic bond of feeling into another, of feeling a relationship, and instead defaults into heated competition.

Matthew Boulton in *God Against Religion* comments that the first murder, the killing of Abel by Cain (Gen. 4:8–10), was motivated by comparison, which led to the competition of worship offerings. When comparison and competition are at their height, fear becomes the driving feeling that sets the terms for our actions. The great warriors of competition in our time, such as baseball pitcher Jack Morris, often say things like: “In my career I was so good because I was motivated by the fear of failing. I hated losing more than I loved winning. Every time I took the mound I worked so hard because I was terrified of failing.”

This may be an appropriate attitude for a professional athlete, but it becomes diabolical in our everyday lives. Comparison that breeds competition becomes the damp con-

Andrew Root teaches youth and family ministry at Luther Seminary. This essay is adapted from his book *The Relational Pastor*. © 2013 by Andrew Root. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, Illinois.

ditions necessary for fear to grow like mold on the material of relationships. And the mold of fear quickly makes relationship uninhabitable to persons. This is so because fear always refuses to indwell another, to be with another; fear pushes away from relationships, even deceiving us into ending relationships so that we might be "safe."

Fear believes that the point of human existence is safety, is self-fulfillment, is your own interest. (Anecdotally, this may be why our greatest warriors of competition have been such miserable people and so bad at relationships; think for instance of Ted Williams and Mickey Mantle, beloved ballplayers who couldn't stay married or ended up estranged from their children.)

Fear inevitably leads to loneliness, to seeking to live outside of relationship. Fear keeps us from allowing others to indwell us and vice versa. Jesus continues to tell his followers to fear not (John 14:27), for fear and personhood cannot coexist. Sin serves death; it perpetuates separation and attacks sharing by seeing others as objects of competition and fearing their very presence.

Empathy is to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). Empathy is the spiritual ability to feel our way into another's place, to feel our way into another's person. It is a spiritual reality with biological/ neurological foundations, but nevertheless it is what persons as spirit do. Empathy is the reflex-like jolt that sends us into another's person, to indwell the other, to be our relationships. It has neurological evidence but is spiritual, as scientists are revealing.

The social and hard sciences have had quite a reunion in the last decade or so. So often at odds, these siblings have found reason to engage in a conversation, to put down their opposition and to look, at least for the moment, at something together. And that something is the mind.

Through MRI scans of the brain and psychological case analysis, these social and hard scientists are exploring how our minds work. A strong case has been made that human beings, having large brains, are distinctly wired to read each other's minds. And our minds are not just large rational calculators but centers of feelings, where certain stimuli affect different parts of the brain, releasing different chemicals. But these releases and affects are the result of encountering other minds. Our brains are wired for the ability to indwell others' minds, recognizing their feelings and responding with actions and discourse that connect one mind to another. Science writer Daniel Goleman explains in *The New Leaders*:

Scientists have begun to [explore]

the *open-loop* nature of the limbic system, our emotional centers. A closed-loop system such as the circulatory system is self-regulating; what's happening in the circulatory system of others around us does not impact our own system. An open-loop system depends largely on external sources to manage itself. In other words, we rely on connections with other people for our own emotional stability.

And this is the point of our distinct ability to read each other's minds: it is for the purpose of putting us in relationships, of giving us the antennas to indwell each other. Psychiatrist Daniel Siegel, author of *Mindsight*, states, "Relationships are woven into the fabric of our interior world. We come to know our own minds through our interactions with others."

Unlike almost all other creatures, the human being spends most of life either being a child or raising children. Not only is our survival dependent on learning, on our large brains, which give us heads we can't hold up until we grow, but also because we are never to be without other minds. Our minds are social organs; we have a mind when it connects with other minds. Our heads are so big and our childhood so long because our brains need the nourishment of other brains. We are to live our lives in relationship.

Evolutionary theorists think that the human strategy to sur-

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vive is the linking of mind to mind, of person to person. Other creatures thrive in a cutthroat world of natural selection by running, attacking or changing colors. But Homo sapiens survive by using the mind to read the mind of others, not only to discern if other Homo sapiens are friend or foe, but to bind their lives with others to use their collective brain power to survive the natural world.

Our brains are wired to connect; our brains only work, these scientists tell us, when we are connected. Synapses fire when they encounter the actions and communication of other minds. Science reveals that there is no such thing as an individual, independent mind; our brains are social organisms that only work when we (when our minds) are in relationship.

This natural/organic reality shows the fundamental importance of relationships to our very ontological form. It shows the very embodied reality of personhood, an embodied reality with spiritual ramifications. The hard sciences have shown that the brain adapts to stimuli—and no stimuli more than human relationships. They have discovered that “synapses that fire together, wire together.” In living in relationship our brains literally connect; they wire together, shaping each other. Empathy, these scientists agree, is a particularly powerful feeling, formed in the brain to allow us to connect our minds to others. Empathy may be formed in the brain, but it is nevertheless spiritual because it sends minds to indwell, to connect to other minds.

The implications of this phenomenon, comments Richard Restak in *The Naked Brain*, is that “you can activate my brain if you can attract my attention enough to get me to watch what you’re doing, and vice versa. Thanks to the mirror neurons in each of our brains, a functional link exists between my brain and yours.”

That our brains are created to indwell other brains is a spiritual reality, a uniquely human capacity given to us because we are spirit, so that we might be spirit. These scientists believe that the more we are together the more we share in each other’s mind.

I had such an experience when my wife Kara and I were newly married and had the great privilege of traveling around the world for six months. While that sounds exotic—and at times it was—it was also filled with excruciatingly boring days and hours. Since we were living on a strict budget, sometimes when

we were too tired to continue walking around the city we were in we could do nothing but rest in a modest hostel room.

But often on the trip one of us would say something randomly, and the other would respond, “Weird, I was just thinking that.” We were sharing so deeply in each other’s lives that some of our random thoughts would pop into the other’s head. Through the experience of indwelling each other, of being so deeply our relationship, our minds were wired together.

The neurological location of this ability to mind read, to indwell others, is in what the hard scientists call mirror neurons. These scientists have actually found a group of neurons in our brains that mirror the actions and feelings of others. It seems to start with simple mimicking.

Advanced studies have been done showing that in conversation persons will, almost as a reflex, mimic each other. If one person’s hands moves, the other’s hand will almost match it but in reverse, like a mirror. This mimicking is located in these mirror neurons, and scientists think it exists for the purpose of sharing. We begin mimicking each other as a way of sharing. We mimic to read each other’s minds. We believe that people are really hearing us, feeling us, when they communicate with their actions by mimicking us—nodding as we nod, looking where we look, opening their eyes as we express emotion. According to Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia in *Mirrors in the Brain*, “when we listen to others, our motor speech brain areas are activated as if we are talking.” Without the simple operation of mimicking, shared action and communication becomes nearly impossible.

For human beings these mirror neurons do much more—they also allow us to feel, to actually participate in another’s feelings. When our mirror neurons are fired by watching another, we are moved to feel what the other feels. Seeing another cry, laugh or yawn, I find myself, if I’m not careful, doing the same. Says Louis Cozolino in *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*:

Mirror neurons and the neural networks they coordinate work together to allow us to automatically react to, move with, and generate a theory of what is on the mind of others. Thus, mirror neurons not only link networks within us but

link us to each other. They appear to be an essential component of the social brain and an important mechanism of communication across the social synapse.

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Our brains are social organs, part of an open-loop system that seeks relationships. This means not only that we can feel empathy. It means that we can pollute each other, thrusting anxiety and fear into each other. Ministries that seek empathy and that yearn for the sharing of persons will need to manage toxic emotions or else an emotional contagion will pervade the community.



by Carol Zaleski

Prayer for the pope

It is a fearful thing to be
The Pope.
That cross will not be laid on me
I hope.
A righteous God would not permit
It.
The Pope himself must often say
After the labours of the day,
“It is a fearful thing to be
Me.”

(A. E. Housman)

AS I WRITE this column, it is early Lent and Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, still reigns, amid rival theories about the reasons for his retirement and rampant speculation about his possible successor. Irish bookmaker Paddy Power gives Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana 11/4 odds—and promises, if a black pope is elected, to refund all losing bets. Cardinal Marc Ouellet of Canada, who has confessed that to be elected pope would be “a living nightmare,” has reason to be concerned, for Paddy Power is ranking him next in line, with 6/1 odds. Richard Dawkins languishes near the bottom of the rankings at 666/1, so he is off the hook.

But as you read this column, *les jeux sont faits*. The Holy Spirit has spoken, the identity of the new pope is known, and there are many questions in the air: Does this pope possess the intellectual strengths of his immediate predecessors? Will he be an effective universal pastor, a generous ecumenist, an evangelizer of modern culture? What will he do to advocate for the imprisoned and persecuted Christians of the world? How will he reach out to young people, women and lapsed Catholics? How will he advance the dialogue of Christians with Jews, Muslims, adherents of other faiths, atheists, secularists and animists? Will he make common cause with the faithful of other traditions in the defense of human dignity and religious freedom? Will he encourage the growth of contemplative monastic life? Will he carry on the work of clarifying and implementing the liturgical and spiritual renewal envisioned by Vatican II? And if these questions are not enough to make the new pope’s heart sink down to the tips of his ruby slippers, how will he support the 12 million Catholics of China, whose government regards loyalty to the Holy See as allegiance to a foreign power?

Inevitably there will also be questions of the “when did you stop beating your wife?” kind. Any skeletons in the new pon-

tiff’s former diocesan closet will be found and put on parade. Any impolitic remark will be amplified and analyzed to death. If there is the slightest ember of suspicion about his past, it will be fanned into flame. And if he is not overwhelmed by the challenge of living up to the charisma of John Paul II or the theological vision of Benedict XVI, who has with some justice been compared to Augustine, the new pope will be weighed down by having their failures thrown in his lap. Analysts tell us that the Curia—the Vatican’s millennia-old bureaucracy—is riddled with corruption and inefficiency. It is natural to hope that the new pope will make a clean sweep.

Natural to hope—but it is unrealistic to expect the new pope to surmount all the obstacles he will face. Moreover, history teaches us that the most necessary reforms and thrilling revitalizations of the church—Vatican II, among others—bring unintended consequences that the devil (if there is such a being) is quick to exploit. *Corruptio optimi pessima*—the corruption of the best is the worst. There are deep fissures in every institution and in every human heart; if there is a devil, he would know where to find them.

In any event, by the time you read this column the Holy Spirit will have spoken and the moment will have arrived to welcome the new pope, wish him well and sympathize with his plight. What we should be looking for in the pope is not a monarch or a CEO but a profound teacher, learned in the essentials of the faith and alive to the cultural moment; not a magician who can fix all that he touches but a man of integrity; not a rock star but a man of prayer who directs our gaze to Christ rather than to himself; not a resounding success but a gospel witness. As the affable and *papabile* Timothy Dolan put it, “You look for somebody who just seems to radiate the love and the tenderness and the mercy and the truth of Jesus Christ.”

If we take the Christian story seriously, the burdens of this pope are not his alone to bear but are shared by everyone who is united with him in prayer, including the laity among Catholics (as Newman said, the church would look pretty silly without them), the rest of the Christian world and the well-wishers of other faiths. If we don’t take the Christian story seriously, then I suppose it doesn’t matter very much. But I prefer to think that if enough of us pray for the new pope, it will help to make his labors more fruitful, his cross lighter, his day-to-day existence less fearful than a living nightmare.

Carol Zaleski teaches at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Cross-shaped story

by LaVonne Neff

On April 13, 2005, Richard Lischer's 33-year-old son, Adam, phoned his dad with the results of his latest medical checkup. His cancer, first diagnosed 16 months previously, was back. It had spread throughout his body.

When Lischer received the call he was in the ER with his father-in-law, who had just had a heart attack. Lischer's wife, Tracy, was in another part of the hospital with her mother, who was being treated for uterine cancer. From their separate stations they ran to their son's side, arriving in time to hear the oncologist say: "Metastatic melanoma typically does not respond well to radiation or chemotherapy."

In just 95 days, Adam Lischer was dead.

"A father has no business writing a book about his son's death," Lischer writes in the first chapter of *Stations of the Heart*.

A parent is not designed to comprehend the child's life in its entirety, any more than the child is meant to experience the parent's early days or youthful indiscretions. It is a sensible arrangement. Children are not permitted to witness the passions that produced them, and parents are not allowed to observe their final hours.

And yet some parents, like Lischer, must watch their children die, and some will write memoirs. Few such memoirs will be published, and fewer still will be read. The death of a child is every parent's worst fear. Even our language makes it difficult to talk about: we can speak of widows and orphans but have no word for people who have lost a child.

A few exceptional memoirs neverthe-

less manage to break through our dread and compel our attention. Two notable ones are John Gunther's inspirational *Death Be Not Proud* (1949) and Nicholas Wolterstorff's anguished *Lament for a Son* (1987), both still in print. *Stations of the Heart* deserves a place alongside these classics for many reasons. It is elegant without excess, personal without self-absorption, profoundly emotional without sentimentality. It tells as much about the father as about the son, exploring the complicated relationship between them. It looks beyond the one man's death to the death we all will face. It raises religious and philosophical questions without offering pat answers.

The story is simple. In late 2003 a melanoma is removed from Adam's back. It's at stage two, the doctor says: a deep lesion, "angry cells," but no lymphatic activity. They have gotten it all, and Adam has a 70 percent probability of remaining cancer free. Every three months he will be checked.

After the brief scare, life returns to normal. Adam joins his mother's law firm in Durham, North Carolina. He and his wife, Jenny, buy a house, plant trees and conceive a child. And then the cancer returns, this time at stage four. There is only a 15 percent chance that it will even respond to treatment, the doctor says. Long-term survival is out of the question. Jenny is nearly six months pregnant.

Adam, his wife and his parents start seeing doctors: dermatologists, surgeons, radiologists, hematologists, oncologists. Four rounds of chemo and radiation all prove ineffective. Other treatments are impossible because of the lesions that have formed in Adam's brain. He has seizures; he returns to the hospital. Jenny is eight and a half months pregnant.

STATIONS of the HEART

Parting with a Son

RICHARD LISCHER

Stations of the Heart: Parting with a Son

By Richard Lischer

Knopf, 272 pp., \$25.00

You know what's going to happen.

What sets this memoir apart from others is neither its anecdotal remembrance of Adam's life nor the bare outline of his dying, but rather its exploration of meaning and wholeness in the midst of suffering. Richard Lischer is a Lutheran minister, a systematic theologian and a professor of preaching at Duke Divinity School. His book's title refers to the stations of the cross, a series of paintings or carvings of Christ's final hours usually displayed in the naves of Catholic churches. The stations in the abbey church at St. John's University in Minnesota are unusual, Lischer writes: they are "nothing more than plain crosses cut into the granite pavement. . . . When you stand or kneel on one of these cross-shaped slits, . . . they remind you that anyone's pain, including your own, can find a place in something larger than itself."

Adam's pain found its place in a community of love, hope and faith. One of his first acts after the dire diagnosis was to be confirmed in his wife's Catholic parish so he and Jenny could receive communion together. Together, every day

they lit candles, said their prayers, recited the psalms, went to daily Mass, did the Stations, knelt at icons, watched old movies, ate pizza, and

LaVonne Neff blogs at *Lively Dust* and reviews books at the Neff Review.

looked at the stars from their deck, all according to a new standard of time that wasn't really time at all, but a heightened awareness of the interlocking spaces through which he had to move to reach his goal.

At Adam's request, his parents joined the young couple "for every treatment, inoculation, consultation, and scan." "Team Adam," they called themselves, and they clung to hope against all hope. "It wasn't that I believed Adam would be cured," Lischer writes, "but in defiance of all the evidence I was positive he would survive, our family would remain whole, and we would bless the Lord."

Friends, colleagues and even strangers began delivering prepared food to the Lischer households. "The cancer dance . . . would have been unendurable," he writes, "were it not for the table and the common meal, where we could laugh, pray, relax, and be our true selves."

But the relentless rogue cells continued to spread, more rapidly than even the pessimistic doctor had anticipated. Adam's *via dolorosa*, his stations of the cross, came to an end just three months after diagnosis. And then came grief—"a series of caves—dark, multiple, and unfathomed. You do not explore them. You fall into them." Clichés such as "moving on," "turning the page" or "closure" were worse than useless; chaos and darkness are prerequisites for creation. Healing takes time.

A novel, wrote Azar Nafisi in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, "is the sensual experience of another world. If you don't enter that world, hold your breath with the characters and become involved in their destiny, you won't be able to empathize,

and empathy is at the heart of the novel. This is how you read a novel: you inhale the experience." She could have been writing about memoir.

The death of a child is an experience no one wants to inhale. And yet, as Lischer points out, we are, all of us, children of dust; "we are all creatures of the gap, living out our days between the giddy promises of youth and the inevitability of death." As Adam's health deteriorated, Lischer found it harder and harder to pray. But bolstered by those who shared his experience and involved themselves in his destiny, he hung on to this hope: that God will remember Adam Lischer, and all the rest of us too, because God loves.

Less than two weeks after Adam died, his daughter was born. "His departure and her arrival were marked by fearful pangs and cries and a leap into the unknown," Lischer writes. "Who would have thought anything resembling joy could follow our night of weeping?"

The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business

By Charles Duhigg

Random House, 400 pp., \$28.00

In 2002, with the publication of *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Malcolm Gladwell sparked enormous popular interest in brain science. Later, his wonderfully titled and well-written *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (2007) established the field of brain science for popular audiences and became the standard primer on the brain's plasticity.

Many other interesting books have appeared in this emerging genre, combining vast scientific data with the sort of popular, narrative-driven exposition per-

Reviewed by Harold K. Bush, author of *Lincoln in His Own Time* and professor of English at Saint Louis University.

"...A must read for Christians paralyzed in survival mode."

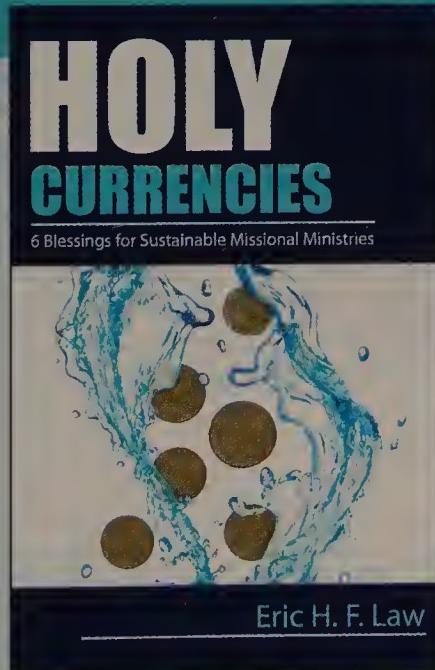
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fected by Gladwell. Two of the most popular recently have been *Imagine: How Creativity Works*, by Jonah Lehrer, and *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*, by Charles Duhigg. Both are filled with intriguing stories and personalities, and both entertainingly introduce general readers to scientific data. They also represent the worst and the best of this genre, respectively.

Representing the worst, *Imagine* came

in for very strong criticism almost immediately upon publication for its simplifications and some dubious conclusions. Isaac Chotiner of the *New Republic* called “almost everything” in the lead narrative of the book—a biographical sketch of Bob Dylan and an account of the composition of his greatest song, “Like a Rolling Stone”—“inaccurate, misleading, or simplistic.” As a Dylan aficionado myself, I concur.

Later Lehrer was outed for fabricating quotes from Dylan and for lying to another journalist investigating the quotes. Now his ethics and trustworthiness were suspect. Ultimately, Lehrer announced publicly that he had lied and then hidden his tracks; he resigned in disgrace from the *New Yorker*, and his publisher yanked the book from circulation (though by then it had already sold over 2 million copies).

Far more developed and convincing in terms of its overall plan and argument and certainly far more trustworthy, Duhigg’s *The Power of Habit* will remind readers of Gladwell’s best work, and it represents the best this genre can muster. An award-winning investigative reporter for the *New York Times*, Duhigg may even surpass Gladwell, particularly in his ability to provide pragmatic and concrete instructions on how to think about and change personal habits. All of his insights are rooted in the emerging science of habit formation, an influential field in the business world and perfected by retail giants like Target. The implications of the book are intriguing for purveyors of faith as well.

Individual change, Duhigg argues, often revolves around certain “keystone habits” that dominate our lives. For example, physical exercise is a keystone habit for some people—a habit that affects many other areas of life in positive ways. But for many of us, bad habits stand between ourselves and such healthy practices. In Duhigg’s account, change commences with the perception of the cues that trigger bad habits and proceeds from there to an embrace of the surprising power of “small wins.” A small win might be, for example, taking a ten-minute walk after dinner, rather than climbing Mount Everest.

Change requires the expectation of reward, or what the spiritually inclined might call hope. We need the capacity to believe that things will get better; change must be an imaginable and feasible reality. As for will power, Duhigg claims that it is grounded in effort, habitual practice and the prevailing agency of human beings. He depicts it as a learnable skill, as something that can be strengthened like a muscle that becomes stronger with habitual use.

Duhigg writes about three kinds of habits: individual, organizational and societal. Fascinating individuals and large

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groups provide the narratives at the heart of the book. He follows pro football coach Tony Dungy, who changed the mind-set of a floundering franchise; Olympic swimming champion Michael Phelps; corporations that have seen breakthroughs, including Alcoa, Target and Procter and Gamble; Martin Luther King Jr., whose networking helped to build a mass movement; and Rick Warren, the pastor of Saddleback Church in California.

One of the book's best sections is the discussion of Starbucks as an educational institution—one of the largest in the United States, Duhigg claims. As odd as that might sound, his argument is compelling: Starbucks has devoted much research and planning to the development of certain kinds of employees, accomplished in large part by altering bad habits and instilling good ones.

In another inspiring section, he writes

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about how Rosa Parks was a well-known and well-liked local personality whose extensive social network accounted for the urgency of the 1955–1956 Montgomery bus boycott. Duhigg's approach challenges the romantic narrative of a single heroic individual leading a mass movement.

Duhigg "thinks about thinking" and encourages us to do the same. His insistence on human agency is encouraging. For too long in the postmodern context, the human subject has been viewed largely as a puppet on the strings of culture, a stage prop of sinister, unseen forces of power. Duhigg emphasizes that our habits are the fruit of many small decisions.

As it turns out, the brain is a much more fascinating, resilient and ever-evolving organ than we imagined, and neuroscience tells us a different story about the brain than what we've been getting from, say, the French philosophers who've been all the rage in humanities departments since the 1960s. Contrary to French theorizing about the captive, postmodern "subject," Duhigg insists that humans have stewardship of the brain, that there are

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specific acts of moral agency that each of us can deploy in the interests of our brain, that we can in large part co-create the kind of brain we'd like to have, and that it's up to each of us to nurture and cultivate our brains throughout our lives.

This effort does require work, and in terms of spirituality it calls for habits and practices that testify to our convictions. In this sense, neuroscience sup-

ports recent works urging a return to Christian spiritual practice and disciplines. Our spirituality consists primarily of our habits—practices we do over and over. Duhigg's book explains how and why such practices become hardwired into our brains. Although Duhigg's title focuses on "life and business," *The Power of Habit* also provides intriguing possibilities for those sowing the fields of the spirit.

BookMarks

Wm & H'ry: Literature, Love, and the Letters between William & Henry James

By J. C. Hallman

University of Iowa Press, 156 pp., \$21.00

The letters that flowed back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean between William and Henry James are voluminous. There would be even more if some of the letters had not been burned to keep family secrets. Here are arguably two of the most influential brothers in American history—one a philosopher and psychologist, the other a literary writer—exchanging their thoughts, offering advice, critiquing each other's work and reporting on the latest news. Their exchanges dealt with aesthetics, art and literature, the nature of consciousness, the occult, their own health and gossip. "Literature rides the horse; letters peer into its mouth," says Hallman.

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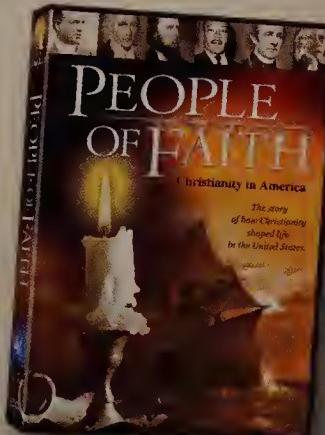
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Laughter Is Sacred Space: The Not-So-Typical Journey of a Mennonite Actor

By Ted Swartz

Herald Press, 280 pp., \$24.99

Ted and Lee (Lee Eshleman and Ted Swartz) were a creative and funny acting team. They wrote most of their own material and were best known for Fish-Eyes, whimsical and provocative sketches based on the life of Jesus. Performing mostly in churches, at denominational conferences and on Christian college campuses, the duo was on the verge of what they hoped was a breakthrough—they contracted to do a 32-scene DVD series with Abingdon Press. But Lee took his own life in 2007 after a lifelong battle with depression, and Ted was left to deal with the void in his life, as well as having to pay off a major debt the team had incurred. Swartz tells a gutsy and inspiring story that will make you laugh and maybe make you cry. It demonstrates that laughter is sacred space through the good and the bad.

Spies and traitors

I got into *Homeland* for local reasons. The action takes place in Washington, D.C., but the Showtime TV series is shot in my state—in Charlotte, North Carolina. Mandy Patinkin, the marvelous actor who was memorable as Inigo Montoya in *The Princess Bride* (“You killed my father. Prepare to die”), plays Saul Berenson, the mentor to Claire Danes’s lead spy. He’s not only been spotted around Charlotte, he’s made his home there and said nice things about it. As a southerner I find myself beholden to such niceties.

The show is a redux of a redux. It’s based on an Israeli book and TV series about captured Israeli soldiers turned into spies by Hamas. That story was based on the 1962 film *The Manchurian Candidate*. The Israeli show was popular and controversial: people worried that it would encourage kidnappings and attempted turnings. The show’s genius lay partly in its ability to make persuasive the scenario of turning a soldier into an enemy spy. In *Homeland*, the worry is that a U.S. marine has become not only a Muslim but a spy for al-Qaeda. Herein also lies a problem with the series: Do we

really need another show equating Islamic practice with terrorism?

As marine sergeant Nicholas Brody, Damian Lewis is so convincing that even his Islamic prayer seems elegant. He washes his hands, sweeps the floor, puts his hands behind his ears and intones, “Allahu Akbar.” That he’s doing this in his garage without the knowledge of his wife and children is key to the plot. That he’s doing this at the terrifying conclusion of the show’s first episode is supposed to cement in the audience’s mind that this man is a mole, a traitor, a terrorist.

At other times the show goes out of its way to suggest that not all Muslims are terrorists: some become informants for the CIA, others carry out important ministry to the downtrodden, and lots of others are innocents blown up as a result of U.S. mistakes or faulty policy. The figure of Brody, the idealized marine hero who prays like a Muslim, captures a primal American fear: maybe “we” are not so different from “them.”

The first episode opens with a group of marines blowing their way into a bunker in Afghanistan and pulling out, to their surprise, a scraggly red-headed American POW. This rescue is a coup for the CIA, but one agent smells a rat. Operations officer Carrie Mathison had heard from an asset in the region that a U.S. soldier had been turned. She’s skeptical of Brody from the start and so risks jail by illegally spying on him. She fidgets nervously as she watches the Brody family readjust to one another: husband and wife together in bed, children with a father they last knew when they were toddlers. As viewers, we’re watching her watching them. Is anybody *not* under surveillance anymore?



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Reviewed by Jason Byassee, senior pastor at
Boone United Methodist Church in North
Carolina.



TURNOAT? U.S. marine Nicholas Brody (played by Damian Lewis) is suspected of being an al-Qaeda recruit in the TV series *Homeland*.

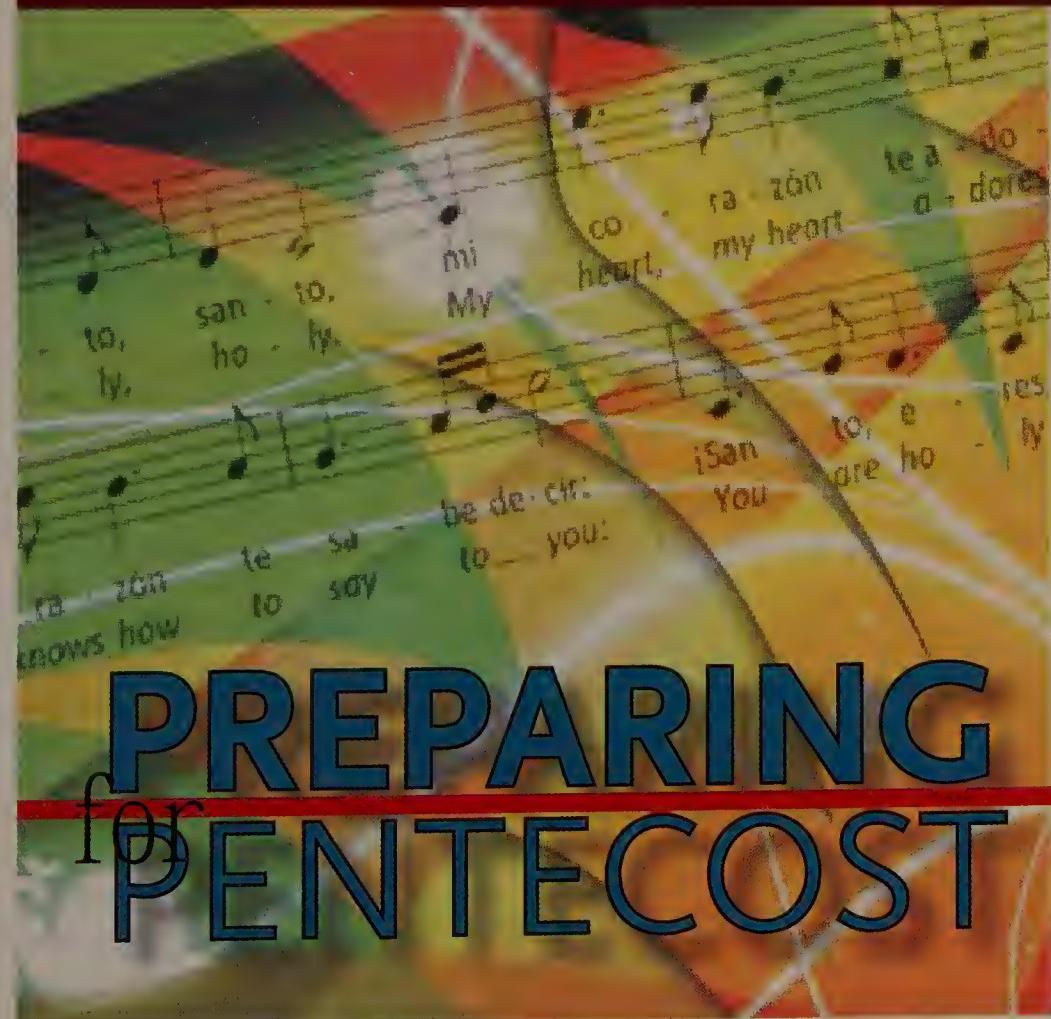
Berenson is the show's conscience. He is Gandalf without the wizardry, here packaged as a Jew from Indiana who doesn't practice his religion much but knows how to say *kaddish* over a dead body. When he learns of Mathi-

son's clandestine operation, he advises her to get a good lawyer. But she manages to convince him that Brody is up to something. Still, he shuts the surveillance down: all the hunches in the world are not enough to "violate the constitu-

tionally protected right to privacy of the Brody family." Is this naïveté or principled morality? The show leaves it uncertain.

Later it becomes clear that a CIA hotshot had used his position to cover up a

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drone strike that killed dozens of children. "It was our joint opinion that the potential collateral damage fell within current matrix parameters," the man explains. "Good God," Berenson responds, "Somebody actually came up with that language." As Catholic theologian Nicholas Lash says, the first casualty of original sin is language.

Danes is electric as Mathison. To add a twist to the story, she takes an anti-

psychotic medicine, which she gets secretly from her sister, since the CIA would kick her out if the agency knew about her illness. As she becomes more bipolar she also becomes clearer on the threat to America posed by Abu Nazir, al-Qaeda leader and Brody's clandestine superior. Danes plays a manic fit as well as anyone, only her "delusions" are real; Brody is a terrorist, but her bosses can't see it. This isn't the first show to suggest

that a mentally ill person might be its sanest character, but Danes's acting saves what could be a cliché.

Brody's family is troubled in the usual ways: the teenager is smoking pot, the preteen is struggling to fit in. But there is an added challenge: Brody's wife, Jessica (Morena Baccarin), got her first call from her presumed-dead husband while lying in bed with Mike (Diego Klattenhoff), Brody's best friend. The family tries to act normal on Brody's return. He is surprised that they have taken up praying, while he was gone. "We prayed every day for eight years that you'd come back," his son explains, implying that it worked.

When Mathison confronts Brody about his conversion to Islam, he explains, "Well the King James Bible wasn't exactly around." More plausibly, he says Abu Nazir was kind to him, brought him into his home, offered him solace in a brutal world.

What he doesn't say is that Nazir's son Issa was killed in a drone strike, which apparently solidified Brody's decision to become an al-Qaeda operative. But will he go through with it? Will he use his status as a celebrity to take out the highest-stake American targets imaginable?

One tossed-off line shows how brilliant the show's writing is. The U.S. secretary of defense is holed up with Brody and others in a safe house after a terrorist attack. Unbeknownst to the others, Brody is wearing a suicide vest. Will he push the button? Or will his loyalty to country and his love of family keep him from going through with it? "What a colossal screwup," the defense secretary says, reflecting on the day's previous attack. They're in the men's room together when the secretary intones again, in the exact same voice, "No paper towels. What another colossal screwup."

The murder of an innocent man equated to the inconvenience of wet hands—what a glimpse of callousness, an imperviousness to suffering that might provoke a suicide bombing. And yet annoyance at wet hands—what an everyday sort of problem, the sort that ought to keep someone intent on murder by suicide from acting. This show puts you in a moral vice and squeezes.

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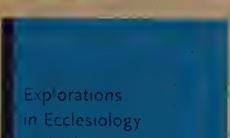
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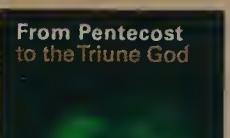
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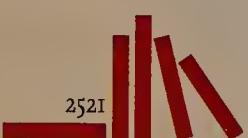
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by Rodney Clapp

American SOUNDINGS

In our hypermediated age, there is much talk of multitasking. Multitaskers come equipped with Internet connections and attempt to engage several tasks with their keyboards, televisions and music players. The multitasker is marked by flitting, fractured attention and a sustained sense of urgency. Since multitasking is mediated by communication devices, it concentrates on the virtual world rather than the physical world surrounding the multitasker.

An older but not entirely lost practice is known as puttering. I know puttering is not a lost art because my spouse, Sandy, and some friends engage in it regularly. Sandy,

an accomplished putterer. I remember him working on car engines, seeing to his farm animals and often stopping to play with cats. My own father was not as comfortable with puttering, but I remember that we puttered at our farm chores. Fill the milk cow's feed box, clean a stall, feed the horse, call in the cow for milking—it all happened at the relaxed pace of the animals themselves.

In this process, Dad could find some time for some merry mischief. Once, when I was in grade school, I arrived home from school and went straight to the barn to join

turned to the barn, where Dad was chuckling. He had chewed and spat straw, acting as if distressed, and I was the victim of a practical joke. Puttering leaves time for such play.

In the spirit of playfulness and with puttering in mind, we could visit anew the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38–41. Martha welcomed Jesus into her home. "She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left

ine and enact a rhythm of puttering, of moving unhurriedly from one task to another and taking time to pause—to pause, in this case, to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to him speak. Mary, on the other hand, knows how to putter. She follows the gentle rhythms of puttering and takes time to stop and devote attention to their visitor.

Mary's story points to another aspect of puttering. Puttering is, or can be, meditative. Puttering does not fight the flow of time but moves at peace along with it. Puttering allows space and time for rumination not only on the tasks at hand but on other things in and around them. Like Mary, the putterer has time to listen, to mull things over, to attend to the day mindfully and meditatively. Putterers are at peace with the world—the actual, physical world in front of them—and their work. They are not "worried and distracted by many things" but instead move in and among their chores at ease.

Perhaps puttering helps one do what the apostle Paul called praying without ceasing. Puttering leaves or opens space for a frequent and leisurely return to prayer throughout the day. Its rhythms are freeing and relaxing. Putterers have "chosen the better part, which will not be taken away" from them.

Putting, unlike multitasking, does not involve a sense of urgency.

as an expert putterer, will start a load of wash, then grade some papers (she is a teacher), check her e-mail, do some dusting, then pay some bills. Puttering differs from multitasking in that most of it is grounded in the actual, physical world. Puttering is also marked by a gentle, even leisurely rhythm; it involves moving back and forth from one chore to another at a sedate pace. Puttering, unlike multitasking, is not marked by a sense of urgency. Puttering allows for breaks in the work, for a cup of coffee or even a burst of play.

My father-in-law was also

Dad in the chores. As I approached the barn door, I heard a moaning sound. When I went inside, Dad was leaning against the wall, grasping his mouth. He groaned. "Tell Mom," he muttered through his hand, "that the stud horse kicked me in the mouth." Then he lifted his hand and spit out white fragments, which I took to be broken teeth.

I dashed to the house and told Mom that Dad was hurt, kicked in the mouth by the horse. She was on to his tricks, however. He's all right, she told me; just go back to the barn. Confused, I re-

me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me." But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Perhaps the main difference between Mary and Martha is that Mary knows how to putter and Martha does not. Martha is so task-oriented that she is "distracted." She can see her service only as a series of urgent tasks. She is unable to imag-

Rodney Clapp's Soundings column appears in every other issue.

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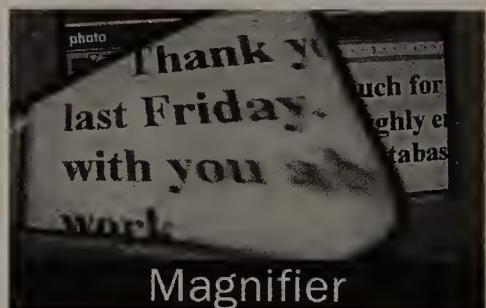
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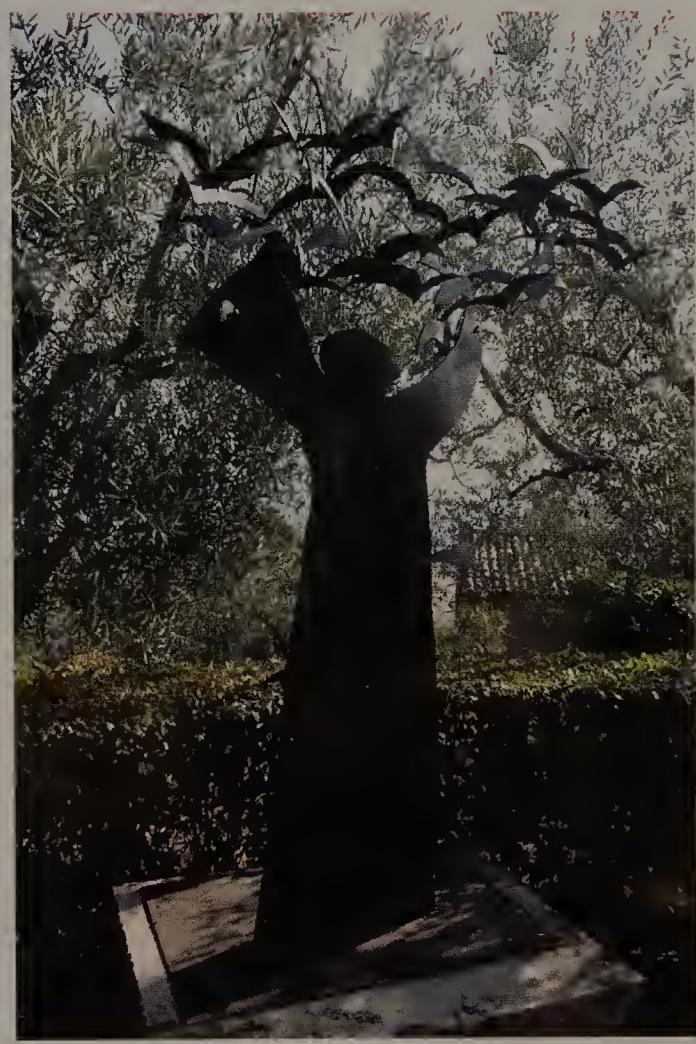
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The Dancing Francis, by Paul T. Granlund, and St. Francis and the Birds, by Frederick Franck

Many people are still inspired by the figure of St. Francis (d. 1226), who gave up a life of relative ease to become a simple follower of Jesus and a friend of all God's creatures. Millions of tourists and pilgrims flock to Assisi, St. Francis's hometown in central Italy. The garden at St. Anthony's Guest House in Assisi, run by the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement, has two modern sculptures. *The Dancing Francis*, by American artist Paul T. Granlund, is based on Francis's canticle "Brother Sun, Sister Moon." It portrays him dancing with God and holding up a sunlike disc containing a cutout of Jesus. Light passes through it and onto Francis. *St. Francis and the Birds*, by Dutch-American artist Frederick Franck, is based on legends about Francis befriending and even preaching to birds and other animals.

—Richard A. Kauffman

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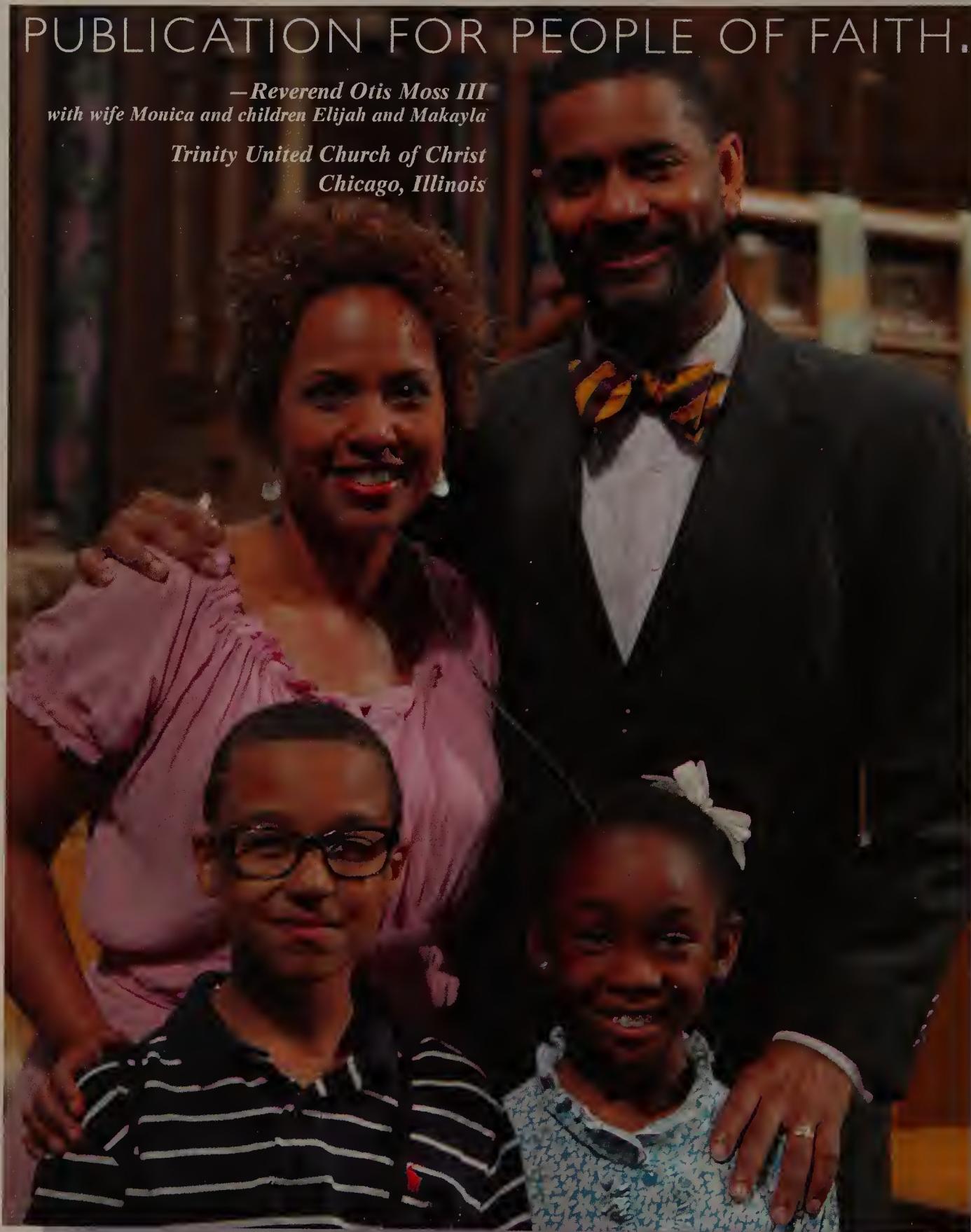


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